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The Tragedy of Ah Qui

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The Tragedy of Ah Qui

and Other Modern Chinese Stories

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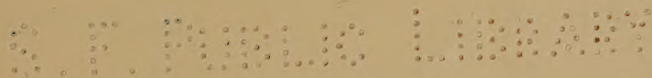
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GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS LTD.

The Tragedy of Ah Qui

and Other Modern Chinese Stories



LONDON

George Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

Broadway House, Carter Lane, E.C.4

1930

Translated from the Chinese by
J. B. KYN YN YU
and from the French by
E. H. F. MILLS

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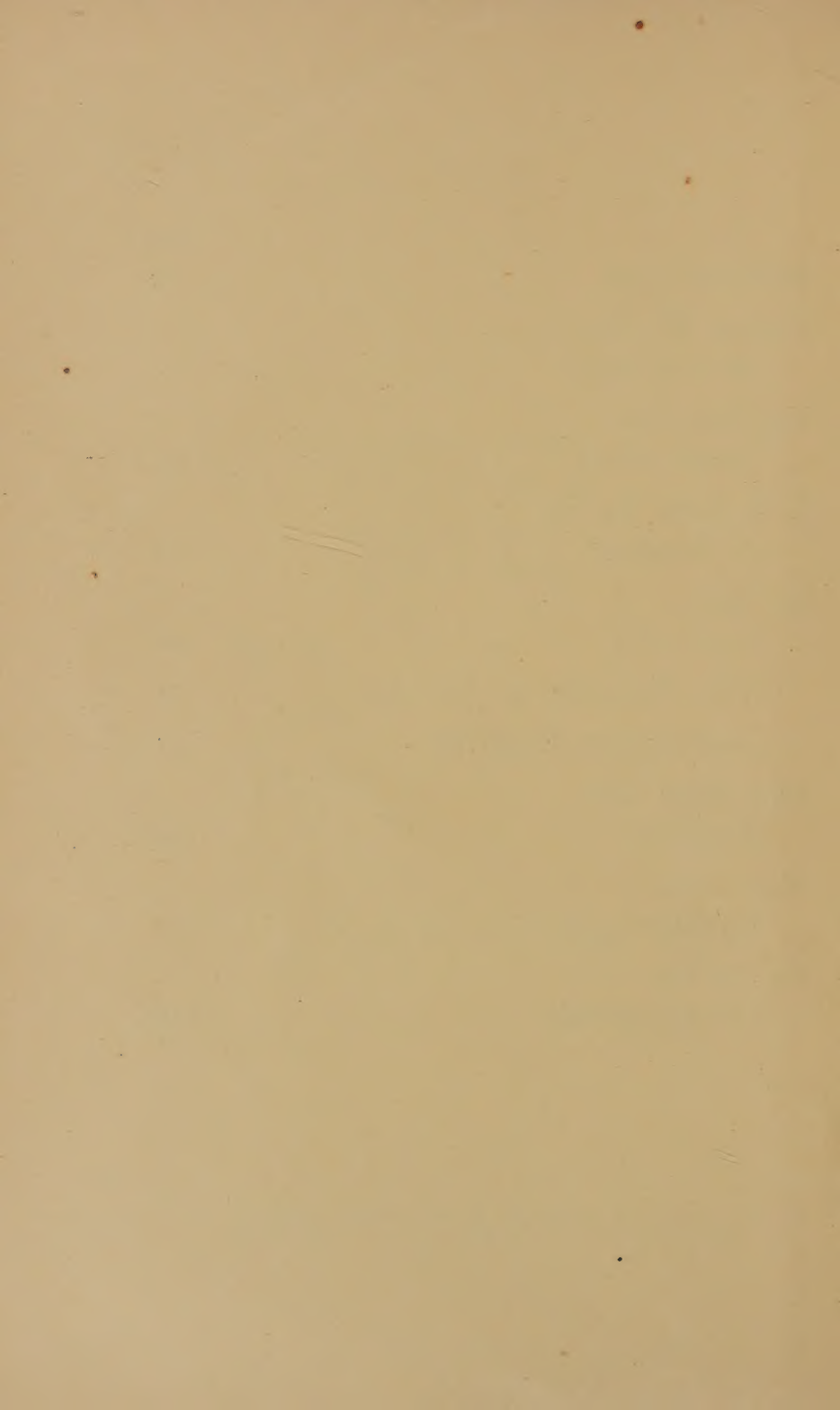
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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE Editor feels that an apology is due for the romanisation of Chinese names employed in this little book. If it had been practicable to secure the Chinese originals of the stories included, the Wade transcription, invariably adopted by English scholars, would have been used, but, unfortunately, this was not so, and the French romanisation has been retained.

INTRODUCTION

SOME friends in Europe, curious about the evolution of Chinese thought, have asked me for an "Anthology" of contemporary short story writers of my country.

I have collected and translated (as well as I could) these few tales. They are, for the most part, the work of students. Europeans will no doubt find in them one aspect of China. But China is so mysterious and so simple! There are men in this world who are calm, silent, and yet profound. The Chinese are like that. The good in them is not exposed to the light of day. They hide it conscientiously, modestly. They think intuitively. Their logic is primitive. Unexpected, rapid, unrelated to each other, their intuitive truths must be seized on the wing, on pain of escaping one for ever. They are also difficult to express. How much more so, then, to submit them to translation! "If the Tao (truth) could be communicated," says Shang Tse, "the husband would communicate it to his wife and the father to his child." "Books are the lees of the ancients." "The Tao that can be expressed," says Lao Tse, "is no more the real Tao." "The Tao escapes the mill of logic, shuns the tumult of passion, and self-interest, and evades the permanent boredom of books. Sometimes it flashes out of its own accord in the thin white

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smoke of the bronze tripod, sometimes it bears the solitary fisherman silent company . . . ”

The modern short story writers show us a new phase of China. Since the Revolution, the black-eyed sage is coming out of his mysterious self, and is throwing himself from the heights of the Kun-Lun into the maelstrom of the world. Formerly a windowless monad, he now feels the fatal need of giving and receiving. He has in his library books in every language. It is more than ten years since, following the example of a professor, Mr. Hu-She, he determined to find a substitute for the old literary language which was too poetic, too concise, to flow into the moulds of logic, or to pass the lips of the proletariat, and so introduced into literature the spoken language, far easier and more convenient than its rival. This is the language which the students employ. But they are not writers, in the European sense of the word. The Chinese, we must note, are less artists than actors. They want to touch everything in the brief space of their lives. Monotonous activity bores them dreadfully. . . . The novel was in old days no more than a literary form despised by the mandarins or Taoists. These latter acted and lived with the Tao. They wrote commentaries on the ancients, or wrought from time to time a few poems of incomparable beauty. Idlers of mediocre talent encumbered literature with their prolix anecdotes of djinns and demons. But go back to the works of Chang Tse, and you will find that his tales, if they too can be called tales, are so closely knit, so beautiful and so profound that a single one of them contains matter for the

INTRODUCTION

conduct and meditation of a lifetime. I recommend them particularly to all who are interested in the Chinese mind.

The modern story writers, most of them too young to have penetrated the labyrinth of the Tao, generally follow the currents of Europe and thus give evidence of an appreciable effort to widen their horizon.

Among them, I draw attention especially to Mr. Lu Siun, at one time a student in Japan, and recently Professor at the University of Peking. He is an enemy of the Tao. But he understands it perhaps better than a great many Confucianists or Taoists. Whence comes this bitter hatred for the old Chinese way of thought (the unfavourable aspects of it) if not from the passionate interest which attaches him to the beloved one for whose perfection he longs? . . . Every man finds his own lot bitter. . . .

After vainly trying the remedies of Europe, which do not suit her disease, China, after a vast detour, will return to plunge into the depths of the Tao. I fear that the silent and mysterious Tao may ever escape the restless dreams of the black eyes.


KYN YN YU.

Lyons.

January, 1929

Cheng Wi Mo

Miss Lysing

 HIS winter I used often to go and visit my friend Hu Wen Yueh in his little rooms in the alley of Konghiuen, where he would be indolently poking his fire. In truth I was drawn to him, not by the originality of his character, or his ideals of life or by any very important interest, but rather by his interminable chatter which covered the emptiness of my call. He was a young man of twenty-four or twenty-five, a good talker, lively, energetic, of remarkable practical ability. Behind his tortoiseshell glasses one could read a fine future smiling upon him.

But still his disordered room, his table covered with a heterogeneous heap of ashes, cigarette ends, broken bottles, worn-out pen nibs, newspapers, envelopes, and I know not what beside, cried out for a reorganisation of which he appeared quite capable, if only he would roll up his sleeves. In a twinkling he could get a good fire going in a stove which the servants found rebellious.

THE TRAGEDY OF AH QUI

He had contracted a marriage of the old-fashioned kind which had brought him no children, and he had never loved his wife who did not fit in with his thoughts, his means or his principles of life. Only his intimate friends knew this. One day, no doubt, they guessed, he might marry again to please himself.

At the faculty lectures on philosophy, he rarely nodded, but in his own house there was no great eagerness to read a philosopher. Amidst a pile of old books of ancient Chinese literature and bad translations of foreign authors, one book shone out, a twelve shilling one: "The Poems of Robert and Elizabeth Browning." Though he read the books that were in fashion, he did not belong to the young contemporary school of literary thought: he never wrote poetry. It was only with great difficulty that his rusty pen could sketch a letter. In the morning he threw himself greedily upon the literary page of the Peking paper, edited by a famous writer, but instantly threw it aside, to hasten on to the despatches and telegrams.

He was not one of those who preach sacrifice of oneself and of others. Nor was he naturally lethargic. There was only this: something—cigarette ends, papers, peanut kernels—blocked his way.

He understood better than anyone the sexual relations of the people in our set. Where I could see only a couple, he perceived their origins, histories, vicissitudes.

MISS LYSING

I was in his rooms one winter morning. He was cooking macaroni on his gas stove. The smoke added still more to the disorder of the house.

"Well, what shall we talk about today?" he said, offering me his chair, while he lay sprawling on his bed.

There I was stuck, ill at ease, for a full quarter of an hour. The macaroni swelled up. I warned my friend, but he remained in a torpor. All at once, I hit on a subject of conversation which would please him, an episode in the life of a couple. I declaimed in a low tone a kind of refrain.

"The macaroni has swelled, it has really swelled! . . . I heard it just now, oh! long ago!"

I could not restrain my laughter.

"What is this nonsense?" he asked.

I told him that once, calling on an old chum, I happened to find them in the middle of supper. The water had been boiling in the pot for a long time. I was thirsty. "The water is boiling," said the husband, "The water is boiling," echoed his wife; "I heard it just now, oh! long ago . . ." But no one was willing to get up.

Suddenly another and far more important question attracted his attention.

"Look," he said, getting up, "Here are three young ladies, coming to see Mr. Outsini."

I turned my head towards the window. The

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first girl, who had already crossed Outsini's threshold, escaped my look. The second was dressed in brown satin, watered with flowers, the skirts embroidered with sapphires. The last, in a Manchu dress of black satin, with black boots and stockings, and a white sash, was the one who made the deepest impression upon me.

"They have come several times," said Hu, resuming his seat; "not all together. Besides, a great many young ladies visit Outsini. The second one comes often. I have not yet seen the first." He looked greedily in the direction of the ladies whence the clear ringing sound of girlish laughter came to us. Outsini, in faultless European dress, was talking volubly; one foot on the door-step, he leaned his stick on it forcibly as if he was trying to bore a hole in it.

"Every time the person adorned with sapphires comes," added Hu, "Outsini's gaiety never fails to overflow. But the girl in the Manchu dress seems to me much prettier."

He then told me how gaily the course of married life ran in the home of one of his friends, whose wife, when the time came to prepare the supper, used to ask his advice with childlike grace, and excuse herself prettily: "If I'm not clever, don't be cross."

Talking of supper, I insisted on the macaroni. He raised the lid, and cried, "It's all dried up!" And we summoned the servant and sent him to find something else to eat.

Business keeping me in another town, I did not see Hu Wen Yueh again for quite a long time. One snowy night in January of the following year, I went to see some of his friends, who were talking about him. I learned that, having had a letter from an old friend of his, a girl, he had gone off with her, at the end of the year, to Hangchow.

"I am sure," said one of them, "that he will not write to us for ages."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why? If Miss Hwang loves him, they are busy weaving the web of their happiness on the Silvery lake, in the valley of the pagoda of Tao Kung, at the foot of the Tower of the Thundering Peak; he has no time to write to us. If, on the other hand, he is a rejected lover, then, plunged in his grief, he will not write to us either. You will see."

I saw him again some months after, when, having brought his wife back from Hangchow, he had set up his little nest with a Manchu family, in the neighbourhood of the pagoda of Macheng. The quarter was full of the establishments of students, most of whom were known to me. Hu Wen Yueh's resembled the others; he occupied three rooms: a bed-room, a study, and a dining-room which served also to receive guests. Bareness reigned in it; and this was not surprising, since furniture in those days was very expensive, and many of these students' households had nothing to pack but

THE TRAGEDY OF AH QUI

their bed-clothes and their suit-cases. But one thing surprised me: I found once more the indolence and disorder of the bachelor of old. And the floor, which in places had got damp, was going mouldy.

"A day will come," I thought, "when Hu Wen Yueh will know how to reorganise all this."

He seemed pleased with his wife, although he noticed a few little faults in her.

"She doesn't know how to cook," he told me. "We shall have to engage a maid, that's all. From childhood, neglected by her step-mother, she has been used to letting herself slide. Now I can discipline myself when I want to. I remember once reading in some book this exquisite phrase: 'The days slip away from the tips of my fingers, I lack a spindle.' Sooner or later I must make a spindle for myself."

His young wife, Miss Hwang, was an elegant woman, with short hair, and usually wore a Manchu dress. Though she was always in a hurry, and her hands and feet were never still, and she never stopped talking at the top of her voice, she yet never seemed alive and active, she always had an indolent air.

Some months later, while Hu was helping the maid with the cooking, his wife said to me:

"I should like to spend my life peacefully, I don't understand why he expects so much competence. He is always insisting that things should be done just so, and he lectures me by the hour. Now I am not like that . . ."

The words soon faded from my memory. A thing I could not forget was his : " I need a spindle."

Hu sometimes ran his household energetically, although he was very soon irritated by it. And he never harangued his wife in my presence. They changed their maid several times, because they had had a baby too soon. The mother told me it was very difficult to keep a maid. One of them used to soil the cakes she gave the child, so that when the parents would not let it have them, she could eat them herself. Another used to take the child for a walk every day ; when she came in she always declared that she had spent six *cash* on apricot tea, or sixteen on a ticket for the Central Park. In reality, as they found on enquiry, she used to take the child to her own house, and give it black tea to drink. The third had looked after the child better, but she used to cough a great deal : they thought she might be consumptive.

The child used to cry too much, especially when its father was there. The more angry he got, the more the child yelled in its mother's arms. Busily engaged in looking after it, she had hardly any leisure to take any interest in her husband, and this displeased him. The most tiresome thing was that the child by its constant crying at night, disturbed the privacy of its parents.

Apart from this, I did not notice any other changes at the Hu's. Long after, one evening

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when the husband and wife were in their room and I was sitting at the dining-room table, my hand was surprised by a strange sensation : no more heaps of paper, no more corks, no more monkey-nuts ; perfect order on the table where a child's stocking, a thimble, a skein of wool, lay peacefully waiting for the mistress's fingers.

"This is interesting," I thought.

But where was the volume of Browning ? And then I remembered that since his marriage he had given up reading poetry, and no longer talked to me about the relations of the sexes. I was grief-stricken. Profiting by my hosts' absence, I tried to find the book. I discovered it, with much difficulty, on a box, beneath a pile of shirts, stockings, dresses, toys, . . . dear old Browning side by side with a beautiful copy of Hiang Yen Ki's love poems.

In the inner room, Hu was talking to his wife.

"Lysing, think of it ! What have been our relations for this long time past ? "

At these words my frail body trembled all over. Ah ! the clear-sighted Hu Wen Yueh, whose understanding of sexual relations was so profound, still had his doubts on that point ! It was too much.

The wife kept silent, and he continued :

"Are we man and wife ? Friends ? Indifferent fellow travellers ? Enemies ? Nothing like that, nothing ! "

Terrified lest this strange catastrophe should make me faint, I fled.

The same evening, a man knocked at my door : it was Hu Wen Yueh. He told me he would go and teach in a school at Ch'ang-Sha. I had nothing to say to him. After a long silence, I asked :

"Where do you come from?"

I had already smelt a strong odour of alcohol, and seen that his face was flushed.

"From outside Tsien Men."

"Oh! How romantic you are!"

Next evening, I went to say good-bye to him. As I entered the court-yard, I saw the baby lying in its cradle, rocked gently by the maid, beneath the blue immensity of the starry sky.

Through the half-open window I heard Hu Wen Yueh's voice.

"You had no business to bargain with him. Order a packet of vermicelli and leave it at that. We'll fix the price with him later in the house. The landlord could settle the dispute, if there is one. But you wanted to seem clever and ask the price beforehand.

"At the first sign of your Hangchow dialect, he would certainly ask two-and-a-half *kios* more; and then, considering your indolent air, he would add another two. Anyone else would have had it for four piastres, while you are charged four forty-five!"

"There's the eloquent Hu lecturing his wife," I said to myself.

To interrupt him I called out from the court-yard: "Wen Yueh! I am here!"

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He came out to bid me good day. The landlord, a Manchu with long moustaches, about fifty years old, was there leaning on his window-sill. Hu said to him :

" You pay four piaßtres for that, don't you ? She gets herself robbed every time she opens her mouth : people see she isn't a native of Pekin."

" Yes, quite true," replied the landlord, dwelling on the last syllable ; " We Pekinese get the benefit of the cheapest market, it's evident."

Hu took a chair and sat down in the courtyard.

" This indolence ! " he groaned.

What suffering was summed up in that one word ! And yet I had to say something to him.

" So when are you leaving ? "

" The day after tomorrow."

" And Lysing ? "

" She's staying here. Perhaps I shall come back and see her at the New Year. The mouse has buried herself in a corner. The carpenter has built his own pillory."

" But Lysing would learn to correct herself. I beg you to take her with you. If you don't lecture her and she applies herself to work a little, all will go well."

" It's impossible now. People would laugh at us. I'm going to test her a little more. We will see whose is the fault."

Lysing came out at this moment, and stood silently on the door-mat, thinking of I know

MISS LYSING

not what, not looking as if she confessed her faults. "She can never be at fault!" Suddenly, I know not how, that conviction came to me.

The night was fresh and calm, the sky silent, sprinkled with stars, enormously vast and high by contrast with the little blue specks of the gables below it. The baby slept in its cradle. I felt my heart swelling . . . I recited below my breath:

*What matter that I have missed the best in life?
Every night I can look towards the stars and be
filled with their chill eternal peace.*

I thought of *The Dangerous Age* of Karin Michaelis, one of my favourite books. When is the dangerous age in a man? I do not know; most men, lucky people, do not have one. . . And the fresh calm night . . .

"Go and look at yourself a moment!" It was the voice of Hu Wen Yueh again.

No, she had no need to look at herself: before her eyes, already fascinated, rose the profile of her harmonious body, the striped Manchu dress, with its delicious curves, her hair waving so gracefully, beauty incorporeal, eternally young, and, although already a mother, still ingenuous and pure as a child. Suddenly there came into my mind an image long forgotten: "Look, here are three young ladies coming to visit Outsini." I heard once more the clear ringing girlish laughter! I saw once more the third girl—far prettier than the second with the sapphire ornaments—in a Manchu


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dress of black satin, with a white silk scarf, and slightly ruffled hair that a comb would scare : oh ! charm of spring and grace of autumn ! She looked as if she were going to dance at the Crystal Palace ball, or wing her flight, like a goddess of the waves, over the starry skies.

Since then I was told that on the day of her husband's departure, Miss Hwang Lysing went with him to the station. When the train had started, she turned her back to it, and stood there motionless, for a long, long time, and then went slowly home, wiping away her tears.

Lo Hwa Sen

After Dusk

HE two little sisters Cheng Hwan and Cheng You, tired by the descent of the steep slope, put down their basket of flowers and sat on the edge of the path. Cheng Hwan, graver and less lively than her younger sister, was seated on the root of an oak tree, gazing at the sky and dreaming, while the other, after a short rest, was already skipping about in the forest and bending down to pluck its treasures.

The flushed sun, just about to set, shot out its luminous arrows ; and the languor of autumn invaded the whole mountain. The sound of the tide was heard in the distance. The birds returning to their nests mingled with the falling leaves in the forest.

Cheng Hwan, elated by the silence and the movement, recited verses she had heard from her father. Then the little one ran up, holding a pile of leaves in the hollow of her dress. "Sister," she said, "why are you talking all alone, instead of coming to help me gather marvels?" And she showed her some dead

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leaves one by one: "This one is a star-fish, this, a shell, this papa's tobacco, and this one . . ."

She went on pouring out explanations of these trifles transformed by her imagination, which roused her enthusiasm and bored her sister.

"Do leave it alone," said her sister. "I will listen to you in our room. Now it is late, we must go home."

They went down the hill flecked by the splendid colours of the setting sun, bathed in the sound of the tide, the echoes of the valleys and the scent of wild flowers.

The older girl walked slowly, regretting the beauty of the dusk; she said:

"It is lovely, this autumn landscape, but unfortunately it is too near the end of the year."

Cheng You, who was only some ten years old, did not understand her. "For my part," she answered, "I like the end of the year, because at the end of the year Papa will give us pretty toys and make us new frocks."

Their house was built at the foot of the mountain, facing the south sea. From it some French cruisers could be seen in the distance ploughing their way through the gulf of Kwang Tung. From time to time, French sailors came and disturbed the peace of the village. The girls did not know whether it was Chinese or French territory.

As soon as they got in, Cheng You raised her tiny voice: "Papa, we're back."

AFTER DUSK

But this time Papa did not come out to kiss them. Cheng Hwan, guessing that he was busy with his carving, motioned to the other not to make a noise. After putting the basket of flowers in the sitting-room, they silently entered their father's study where stood many paintings and sculptures, some finished, most of them his own work. He was not there. Cheng Hwan, glancing at the wall, said to her sister :

"Papa has gone out with his guitar. Go and look for him at Mother's grave. I will get the meal ready and wait for you in the kitchen."

As she crossed the orchard behind the house, Cheng You heard the guitar and the plaintive singing of her father. She drew near on tip-toe and stood behind her father, in front of the marble statue, which bore this inscription : To my wife Kwan Shan heng mei (ever gracious fortresses and mountains) and, below, in small letters : Her husband Kwan Hwai (happy memories). He played and sang until the sun disappeared beneath the horizon ; then holding his guitar in one hand, and leading his daughter with the other, he slowly went back to the house.

As soon as they reached the door-step, Cheng You called out : "Here's Papa back again !" Her elder sister came out at once, and greeted them with the words : "The meal is ready. Go to the dining-room, I am going to serve up."

The father, guiding the little one, went into

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the sitting-room, took off his false pig-tail and hung it on the wall, sat down on the sofa and kindly asked her what she had done on her walk.

With his short hair and his pointed beard, he looked like a Japanese of about fifty.

A moment afterwards, when the elder girl was dishing up the supper, he said: "Today we came in exceptionally late. Your sister has just told me you were reciting my poems during your walk. Mine are feeble, but your Mother's . . . if only you had heard them! This morning, when I was going through the drawer, I came across the album of poetry which your Mother composed for me more than ten years ago. I set the twelve poems 'Since thy departure . . .,' to music, and your Mother was very fond of it. This is the first time for twelve years that I have sung them, at your Mother's grave, and that is what made us late."

"I have never heard those pretty verses," said the elder.

"Nor have I," said the younger.

The father, stroking Cheng You's head, said:

"Didn't you hear them just now?"

"That doesn't count!"

"It's true that neither of you understands them. In a minute, I will tell you your Mother's story instead."

After supper, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, smoking a cigar, the old widower told his daughters about a part of his past life.

AFTER DUSK

They followed him with startled looks, with fluttering eye-lids and dancing eyes, just as a cat hidden beneath the foliage watches the butterfly flitting over the flowers.

"I have often meant to explain all this to you, but you were too young to understand me, and I kept silent until today. Why do we live here? That is what astonishes not only the neighbours, but also little Hwan, now you are both older. You are going to understand me.

"A little after my return from France to Hong Kong, I married your Mother. At that time we were fighting the Japanese. The Lord Teng, having engaged two French advisers, summoned me to his camp to act as interpreter. I refused. I went to Europe to learn the fine arts. It was not my business to interpret military advice. But when the Lord Teng insisted, I accepted. This did not please Mother. Still, I had promised, and she did not want to hinder me.

"When I set out, she cut her hair and made it into a false pig-tail. There it is." (He pointed with his cigar to the plait of hair hanging on the wall.) "It was a kind of trade-mark, indispensable to officials. It served me for many years; I have had it renewed several times. Perhaps today not one hair of your Mother's is left.

"When I reached Shanghai, the two Frenchmen, seeing the bad position we were in, dared

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not poke their noses into it. The Lord Teng kept me none the less, meaning to use me for other possible services. So I stayed in Shanghai. There I heard a succession of bad news. After the Lord Teng had been killed at Wei hai wei, I came back home. These are the twelve poems your Mother offered me on my return."

Cheng Hwan interrupted him:

"Papa, explain to us the meaning of these poems."

"No, it is impossible. Not one person in three could ever understand them. I myself do not know how to explain them. They are on the third shelf, you shall read them presently, if you like. Now let me go on with our story.

"After this defeat, full of grief and covered with shame, I determined to live in a distant island, far from all my acquaintances. With your Mother's consent, we settled here. Although the district of my birth was quite near, relations were broken off and we found ourselves alone among strangers.

"I bought this property and the orchard attached to it. We were very happy. A short time after, Hwan, you were born, and we called you Cheng Hwan which means 'fruit of joy.'"

"What about me?" interrupted Cheng You.

"You don't come in yet. Wait a bit. . . . We did not like being helped by others. As your Mother and I knew nothing of agriculture, we contented ourselves with cultivating

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fruit-trees to earn a living. The almonds on the west side of the garden we planted on the first anniversary of your birth. Mother then used to pass the time in suckling and nursing you, and I in working at the arts and gardening. Several years slipped away thus. How happy we were !

“ But alas ! happiness does not last for ever ! In the fifth year, this corner of land was in its turn occupied by the French ! I tried to emigrate once more, to save myself the sight of the disgrace ; but cruel fate seemed to have exiled us for ever in this ruined land.”

At this point in his tale, he could not restrain a groan of indignation and regret ; and his closed and downcast eyes grew dark.

“ It is pleasant here, why should we change house ? ” said the younger girl.

“ I remember,” interrupted the older : “ Papa, you told me Mother died that year.”

“ Yes, I was about to tell you so. Before, when we moved for the first time, Mother had conceived little Hwan. Tossed by the tempest during the sea-voyage, she was ill for a long time. This time she bore in her womb little You. For fear of an accident, I waited for your birth before we left. Alas, when the treaty with the French was signed, your Mother could not ever leave her bed again.”

His voice trembled. Cheng Hwan's eyes filled with tears. Kwan Hwai frowned and went on :
“ Twenty-four hours afterwards . . . ”

THE TRAGEDY OF AH QUI

"When I was born?" asked Cheng You.

"Twenty-four hours after you were born, your Mother died. I called you Cheng You, which means 'fruit of grief.'"

The two children wept. Then all three were silent.

The sound of the tide coming through the front door, and the trilling of the crickets outside the back window, reached the sitting-room, accompanied by a fresh breeze. On the table wavered the dull red light of the dying lamp.

"Little Hwan," said her father, "close the door and the windows, snuff the lamp, and go to bed with your sister, she is sleepy."

But Cheng You, whose curiosity was vividly aroused by the story of her birth, did not want to go to bed. She jumped off her little stool, ran to her father and sat on his knees.

"Papa," she said, shaking him with all her childish strength, "That's not all? Go on! I don't want to go up."

Cheng Hwan, as she shut the windows, added:

"Papa, I too beg you to tell us the rest; there's no great harm in going to bed a little late this evening."

After trimming the lamp, she sat down in the same place, her eyes fixed on her father.

Now the lamp shone brightly. Kwan Hwai, suddenly looking towards the plaster statue in the corner of the room, pointed it out to his daughters with his hand.

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"There," said he, "is your Mother some hours before she died."

"My sister has told me," said the little one, "that it is Mother. But I think the Mother in Papa's room is the real one. Mother couldn't be as ugly as that."

"This one is as beautiful," he said, stroking Cheng You's head, "only you do not understand that kind of beauty."

He went on giving his reasons so long that he forgot his story. At last brought back to the point by Cheng Hwan, he took up the thread again.

"Your Mother's death prevented my moving. Since her body was buried in this ruined and dishonoured soil, and little You was still too young, I decided to stay here for always.

"I do not like employing strangers, even a nurse. My task was indeed difficult. The worst thing is that you soil your clothes and wear them out too quickly. I do not know how to cut out and sew. I am forced, despite everything, to have recourse to others. The neighbours have often advised me to marry again."

"Why haven't you?" asked Cheng Hwan.

Kwan Hwai, with half-closed eyes, drew long at his cigar; a moment after, exhaling the smoke as he spoke, he began again gravely:

"Can a man be like a beast . . . with no memory?" Meantime, Cheng You, in a halo of smoke, was coughing slightly. "Papa's

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mouth," she said, in a strangled voice, "is like the Wangs' furnace; that tickles one's eyes and throat."

The father patted her on the back:

"You know very well," he said, "too well even, how to draw comparisons. I got into the habit of smoking cigars in Europe. One can quite well do without them. There, throw that away for me. You see, the man who knows how to resign himself and to endure privations, avoids a great many troubles. Little Hwan, will you be able to endure a step-mother? Even without Mother, you have still been able to live peacefully till now; with a step-mother you would have gone to the bad."

The sound of the tide, the trilling of the crickets, the tinkling of the hooks on the roof, the hooting of the night-birds, came in through the cracks in the doors and the windows, invaded the house, and disturbed the old widower's talk. As the two children still kept quiet, the father was moved by these noises. He cast a startled look at the shapeless shadows which threatened the windows, listened anxiously, and said:

"Every time I hear the roof-hooks tinkle, I think of the tiny silvery sound made by the ornaments on your Mother's shoes, when, newly-wed, she was walking to the marriage-chamber . . ." He looked at Cheng Hwan, and went on:

"Your Mother was called Shan (Mountain).

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Every time I see a mountain or any shape which resembles one, I think of your Mother. No, she is not dead in my memory. She is not dead, she is only hidden, so that she might avoid greater evils. At night, in the silence, she always comes to keep me company ; she also often comes to see you : but you no longer recognise her."

"It must be when I'm asleep," said Cheng You, "that Mother comes ; if not I should have recognised her and spoken to her."

"Yes," answered the old man, patting her cheeks, "Mother has praised you for your piety and intelligence ; she prefers you to your elder sister who forgets her as she grows up."

Cheng Hwan, knowing that her father only spoke like that to please her young sister, answered complacently :

"I, too, am always thinking of Mother ; but it's strange that when she comes I no longer see her."

"You were still too young," said the old man, "when your Mother left you. Perhaps you do not now remember what she looked like ; but be sure that to know a person intimately, one must go deeper than his body, which is only a momentary appearance. The tree flowers in spring, bears fruit in summer, grows yellow and loses its leaves in autumn, is dormant in winter ; the tree is the sum of all these successive phases. The insentient being changes

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slowly, the sentient quickly. So I look on the tomb as the body of your Mother, transformed ; she has become taller, harder than I ; that is all."

"Oh !" said little You, "now I know Mother is not dead. Does she love us too, as you do ?"

"Yes, far better than I."

Cheng You, riding on her father's knees, kicked out her little legs with all her might :

"It's true," she cried, "Then why don't you make her come out of the tomb, that we may see her ? It would be lovely ! Before I used to think Mother was cruel, with her staring eyes which looked and could not see ; when I spoke to her she did not answer ; I don't know where she has hidden her two hands ; I used to caress her, and she did not stir. Papa, open the tomb and let me go and look for the other Mother who, you say, knows how to love us."

"The other Mother," said Kwan Hwai, kissing his daughter, "is the same as the one in the room." (He pointed to the statue.) "There is a third Mother whom you cannot find. She is in my heart, in your hearts, in everything that surrounds us. Everywhere I see her face and hear her voice. Be good and pious, devote your hearts to Mother, and you will see her, and she will talk to you."

Meantime the late night brought a chill with it, exhausted the lamp-oil, and made the eye-lids of Cheng You drowsy.

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"It is late, my child," said the father. "Mother's story is long, a year would not be enough. I will tell it you later, bit by bit. Now you must go and kiss Mother, and then go to bed like a good girl."

After putting the child to bed, he went back to his room, took off his cloak, and for a long time fingered with infinite regret his opal ring and the jade pendants on his girdle, the cherished souvenirs of his dead wife. It was one of his habits, before he went to sleep. He went up to the statue, felt the hard, insensible figure, and said: "My darling, I thank thee for having left the two children who console my old age. But without thee life is empty, and the nights are long. I hope, and wait, for thy resurrection."

Silent and respectful, he waited long for the statue's answer, which unfortunately our too imperfect hearing cannot catch.

After a long silence, he turned his head and saw Cheng Hwan still in the room weaving flowers into her basket and humming to herself. He said to her through the window:

"It's after midnight, my daughter, leave your work alone and go on with it tomorrow. Now it is time for you to rest. Look after your sister a little, she is too excited and might have bad dreams."

Cheng Hwan having taken away the lamp, darkness filled the house. A glow-worm, wandering into Kwan Hwai's room, settled


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upon the head of Kwan Shan heng mei ; first she smiled, and then her eyes became soft.

And the sound of the tide, the grating noise of the crickets and the tinkling of the roof-hooks rocked the cradle of the silent night harmoniously, like an eternal lullaby of the beloved one.

J. B. Kyn Yn Yu

A Divorce

HE boat was crowded with travellers whose dress, position and aims varied greatly. On the poop, sitting side-by-side, a father and his son were marked out for notice by the strange contrast which divided their two generations. Hwang-She-Kou—that was the young man's name—about twenty-six years old, wore a European hat, with pointed beard well brushed, and a dress of fashionable cut. His forehead showed self-will, his eyes were hard. The father's dress, on the contrary, was wide and ill-fitting; his grey beard and hair were long and shaggy. Hwang had an indolent, yet austere, appearance; his eyes were dreamy, rather haughty, and seemed to understand everything and to despise whatever they did not understand. Deeply attached to his own district where he was respected as a learned man and a rich farmer, he was probably making his first voyage in a steamer; he was bringing back from the capital his only son, who had just completed his University course there. He

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was talking in a grave tone and in brief, concise sentences ; coughing from time to time in a way that compelled attention.

“Now,” he said to his son, “you have completed your studies. You are becoming a man. A man must conform to the rules and obey his duties. Everything has its rules. Without rules, nothing whether round or square can be made. Think three times before you act. . . .” Since, now that he was getting old, he had forgotten many of the Confucian maxims, it became difficult to carry on his discourse in this style. So, after a solemn cough, he changed the subject.

Meantime the boat skirted the mountains. White maize, yellow trees, slimy rocks, all this sped backwards into the dying redness of the setting sun. The father and son were drawing near their native country.

“During your absence,” continued the father, in a tone still gruff but a little moved, “years have passed. Your mother was often ill. She did not leave her bed. The daughter-in-law is very pious. She looked after her by day, and watched with her at night. She is worthy of her family which has been well-educated for generations. . . . But there are three kinds of filial impiety, of which non-procreation is the chief. That is your failing. Do not imitate the young people of today, revolutionaries and impious, who no longer know the three principles and the five orders. Act in such a way that your

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mother may live in peace and reach her hundredth year."

"Yes, yes," answered the young man shortly, pensive, frowning, tapping the arm of his bamboo chair with his fingers.

His father's bouts of coughing, his mother's illness, and above all the thought of his wife, disturbed him.

Some ten years before, at the beginning of his secondary studies, he had prematurely married, at the order of his parents, a girl of fourteen. The marriage ceremony had made some impression on him. Then he lost his gaiety when with his family. This unknown person, timid and silent, embarrassed him. She, who chattered and got on marvellously well with all the family, bristled up before him as though an enemy were coming. She blushed whenever her husband's name was mentioned. From dawn until late at night, indifferent to him, she obstinately did her housework, her little pointed feet perpetually coming and going; this had displeased him from the first day. She was admired by all, reckoned the perfect type of the good wife. Oh! "goodness," what a long wall thou raisest between man and wife! The marriage room had the icy silence and the sombre rigidity of a tomb. It terrified him. He preferred the gay company of his school friends. In the end he no longer came in to sleep. His parents often blamed him for it. Angry he went away. For almost six years he

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had dwelt in the capital, where he had profoundly changed.

There, in the haunts of students, he had imbibed new ideas on morality, on life and love. He had known pretty girls as comrades there, gay, friendly, eloquent, free and easy, bold, who busied themselves with politics, with revolution, with the course of the new literature, and their soft flirtations, their arch conversation, had deeply charmed him. Even their infidelities had caused him delicious emotions. The day he made a position for himself, it was among them that he would find his ideal companion. He was persuaded that marriage without love was an inhuman thing, a loathsome remnant of the old institutions which must be energetically destroyed. And he had decided on divorce, which was one of the motives of his return.

They landed as evening came on. Beneath the mountains now turning blue lay the grey splashes of the cottages of the village of Shwang-ho, pierced here and there by golden points of light. Narrow, dark streets. Restaurants, tea-shops, where meat is smoked. The quiet landscape was little changed, despite the ravages of the soldiers. At the entrance of their house, the great round lantern, streaked with red letters, the square door and the black varnished wood of the grille . . . the same out-of-date luxury.

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There the white-haired mother awaited the return of her son. At sight of him, she cried out for joy ; she stretched out her arms to him ; a tender laugh sprang up in her sunken eyes wet with tears, and spread to the countless wrinkles of her now thin face. She drenched him with affectionate and childish questions ; he could only smile ; the old servant, Mother Song,—who had seen the great wedding ceremony of the aged mistress—questioned him and answered for him all at random.

The first flood of effusiveness over, they listened curiously in the sitting-room-refectory while he told them about his years of absence. Involuntarily there sprang to his lips arguments and neologisms which they did not understand. They looked at him in astonishment. Visibly they could no longer follow his story. An invisible wall separated them. At last, embarrassed and distressed, he fell silent.

Meantime, Soucheng was sitting silently before a copper lamp in her room. She looked all round the room which she had so carefully been arranging the whole afternoon. She was anxious, too, to see what her husband was like after so long an absence. But, like a well-brought-up woman, she must not seem to be in too great a hurry. The life of a wife was made up of constant waiting. In early days, an idle girl, overflowing with dreams and with love, she had always anxiously and mysteriously awaited an unknown man, future master of her

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fate—for, hardly out of her cradle, she already belonged no longer, so people said, to her own family. And the blind soothsayer's violin, the wick of her lamp, everything, served as an omen to her. Yet she used never to speak of it. There are so many things in the world which it is indecent to say. All her life had flowed away in solitude and silence. . . . As, in her beflowered chair, she left her mother's house, she had wept long, from happiness and fear. The great marriage night, the rowdy solemnity of which had almost stupefied her, had passed like a flash of lightning. Through the red muslin which veiled her shamefaced countenance, she had had only a confused image of the man of whom she had so long dreamed.

From that time on, she never dared to look him in the face. They never spoke to each other. She felt instinctively that she did not please him. Why? She searched for every possible reason in herself and bore no grudge against anyone. Was it her eyebrows? Her hair? In short, her eight birth letters were fatally unlucky, that was all. For her part, she loved him with all her life, because he was her husband. . . . He ceased to come in. He went away. Men had their reasons. Then came the monotonous labours of the household; and a new and melancholy waiting for the absent one. She had no child yet. Without a child, a wife was nothing, and life was empty.

In the midst of her silent embroidery, in the

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greenery of spring, after her summer siestas, during the cold, interminable nights of winter, in her enchanted dreams, how often did the image of her husband rise before her, in an aureole of charm and sweetness. . . . By dint of patience and humility she had soon acquired the sympathy of the whole family; but the enemy—her husband—remained always a disquieting enigma. Sometimes she even hated him deliciously, when he was far away. Near by, he disturbed every fibre of her frail body. The news of his return had brought her joy like that of the Great Night. Now that he was there, on the other side of the curtain, she was torn by anguish. She could hear the flow of unintelligible words of which she was timidly proud, and the flatteries of her mother-in-law—which made her laugh, and the chatter of the old servant, which irritated her. Soon silence and emptiness spread around him. The whole family was ill at ease, as though in the presence of a stranger. The mother-in-law said to him :

“You are tired with your journey, my son, go and rest a little in your room.”

And slow steps dragged towards the marriage-chamber. The old servant, who had just announced the good news to her young mistress winked at her, made a wry face, and discreetly stole away. Soucheng trembled, took a rapid glance at her mirror, and stood up, every nerve taut in shameful and terrible expectancy, Nonchalantly he sat down on a chair and looked at

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his wife. She bent her head, and leaned against a corner of the wardrobe. He was once more in the presence of a feminine statue, dumb, inert. Everything in the room breathed the spirit of discomfort and heaviness. The enormous wardrobe, the tables, the massive square chairs, the monumental bed, like a sculptured trophy—all this weight of gravity and decrepitude overwhelmed the couple. No, this was not an abode of the living. The wife stood petrified like a goddess of silence. Her lowered face was shot by red and dull patches, like the sharp alternations of rain and fine weather beneath the sky. The night was getting old. The motionless silence seemed likely to continue for an eternity. An unendurable moment ! He, She-Kou, freed from all superstitious beliefs, wanting to create his own life for himself every moment, detested this woman with her pointed feet who did not know how to want anything, who, if she had been hurled into a tomb, would have resigned herself to destiny. She might be a slave or a tyrant. But he wanted a friend and a companion of his life, a thing this weak girl would never have imagined. What was there in him that made him so much feared ? Oh ! what a dreadful solitude it was to be feared for no reason ! How much he would have preferred a naïve, open child ! No, she did not understand him, never would understand him.

Meantime Soucheng's heart swelled with

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submissive tenderness, waited only a single word, a sign, to give itself. Inactive, she could clearly see her husband's hostility which every moment terrified her more and more. At last, she was about to risk saying something, if only something silly, when, suddenly, he got up and went out.

"Ai-yah! young mistress," cried the old servant, in terror; "What? Has our young master slept in the sitting-room? What a scandal! What are we to do? What are we to do? And why? Young mistress, I think he did not say a word to you? Is it not so?"

Soucheng sighed.

"Don't call your mistress's attention to it," she said in a tone of gentle authority.

She held out to the maid a bed-spread and a roll of mosquito-killer.

"Ai-yah! Everything in the world is subject to Fate," muttered the old servant as she lit the roll. "Poor young mistress! She is wise and virtuous among a thousand women! Madam took such pains in choosing her! What is the matter with our young master? Heaven has eyes, aye!"

As soon as the servant had gone out, Soucheng collapsed on her bed and wept. The scarlet light of the lamp wavered silently. From the lawn in the court rose the eternal trilling of the crickets.

The night-watchman struck the fourth blow upon his cymbals.

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On the sofa in the sitting-room the heartless husband snored.

For some time the Hwang family had fallen more and more deeply into the grip of silence.

Neither the tablets of the ancestors, nor examples drawn from the ancients, nor exhortations, nor threats, could convert the rebellious son: he answered that he could not live with his wife. Never leaving his study, he received and wrote letters: he lived in a far-off land.

Hwang, the father, all day stretched on his bed, smoked opium, crying out at intervals and beating his head: "Oh! the young people of today! The young people of today!"

The mother, confined to her bed, moaned and coughed pitiably, scolded her impious son, her maid and sometimes even her daughter-in-law, whom she afterwards exhorted to resign herself.

"It is the expiation," she concluded, "of the sins of my former lives. My wise daughter-in-law, you know that I have lived long enough; when I have departed, the enemy will leave you in peace."

The servants whispered to each other, seeming to pity their young mistress, who had always treated all of them well. They insensibly began to take longer over their work.

Soucheng alone seemed to ignore all these changes. She looked after her mother-in-law,

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waited on her father-in-law, and carried out her household duties more diligently than usual.

The last day came. The day before, a messenger from her mother's family had come to take her away, that she might have a few days' rest, as he said. It was the end of autumn. The swallows were leaving. In the garden, the broad leaves of the eucalyptus, yellowed and rusty, fluttered in the wind and fell. In the flower-beds, the heads of the begonias were drooping, fallen asleep.

Soucheng rose very early, bent all her energies to folding carefully the broad, square bed-clothes, to polishing the monumental bed, to arranging the double embroideries of Yuen-Yang, the enamels of Mei, an interminable task. Then, she went to do out her mother-in-law's room. The latter, very embarrassed by the situation, pretended to be asleep.

"Young mistress, allow me to help you. You are so tired!" Mother Song kept repeating, sorry for her mistress. "No, Mother Song, let me finish my duties by myself." And she added, in a low voice, as though talking to herself: "From now on, I shall no longer be able to do this."

The old servant, for fear of embarrassing her by her presence, went out slowly, snivelling.

"Oh, young mistress, so wise and so virtuous! . . . Now I do indeed believe: when one is born a woman it is always to expiate . . ."

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Soucheng did not finish her duties as daughter-in-law until the afternoon. Then she went back to her mother-in-law's room and threw herself down at the foot of the bed :

"Mother," she said, "the daughter-in-law is going. I hope that another will serve you better than I."

Her voice trembled, she lowered her eyes. The mother held her back with her feverish hands ; she was shaken by sobs. While outside the messenger was urgent, crying the same words as those of the usher at the marriage-ceremonies of earlier days :

"Kindly enter the sedan-chair !"

She looked for the last time, through the doors of her chair, upon her husband's house with its bamboos tossed by the autumn wind which whistled like an evil spirit.

Some days later, the sad news of Soucheng's death reached the family of Hwang. The old servant heard it from the mercer's wife, the mercer spread it in the bars and the tea-shops, where everyone discussed the daughter-in-law Hwang in every detail. At first, they suspected that she had conducted herself ill. Then, suddenly, all opinions veered in favour of the brave woman because she had killed herself, and sacrificed herself for virtue's sake. So faithful, so devoted to her old, sick parents-in-law, unjustly dismissed, she wept unceasingly, could no longer eat or sleep. . . . On the

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third night, at three o'clock, and at the third minute, when the world of living men was silent, the heroic woman hanged herself from the lintel of her bed, wearing her red muslin wedding gown, her eyes still open after her death, her tongue hanging out, long, so long . . . ; adorned, too, she was, in her festival robes ; and at the last moment she still invoked the name of her husband, whom she would await beneath the earth, on the husband's Mound of Regrets. . . . In any case they had to hold a solemn incantation to appease the wrath of her spirit. She, Mother Song, had often seen the tragedy of Wang-Houi ! . . . The spirit of every good person was powerful and terrible.

The babbling of the old servant was interrupted by bursts of weeping. The mother sobbed, and overwhelmed with curses her son, the heartless husband. Unable to find any further answer, feeling his guilt towards the unhappy creature, he went, with bowed head, to shut himself up in the marriage-chamber.

Leaning on the massive table, beneath the gloomy scarlet light of the copper lamps where the image of his wife sitting silently all the time gently brushed against him, he was invaded by melancholy and immense regret. Then, hiding his eyes in his two hands, despite himself he wept. Now grown used to idle solitude and inactive emotion, he better understood his

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wife, that daughter of silence. Alive, she was as cold as a statue ; but what sweet memories after her death ! He was very gross and hard, he, the active man, who had not known how to win his way into the depths of that loving heart. Now, in the arrangement of the furniture of the room, in the scent of musk which pervaded the embroideries and the drawers, in all the silent attitudes of the dead woman, he discovered that gentle, tender heart, at once filial and maternal, so touchingly loyal and sensitive, full of modest and inexhaustible charm, and of a perpetual poetic reverie ; it was like the ancient monument of conjugal felicity on the river bank, which annoyed the passers-by by its dustiness and its position, but yet, as it caught the purple reflection of the setting sun and brought to life the blue waves with its gilded silhouette, so often caused the tourist's bark to tarry. . . .

The scarlet flame of the lamp wavered silently. . . . The horn of the watchman boomed in the monotonous night. . . . On the other side of the partition, the groans and lamentations of his mother, now ill cared-for, cried out to the spirit of the wise daughter-in-law. . . . Outside, in the darkness, the ceaseless, melancholy trilling of the crickets lulled the silence. . . . He could not rest all that night. This thousand-year-old world of dreams and memories—the old China—vibrated within him and oppressed him. . . . Towards

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daybreak, tired out at last, he fell asleep, haunted by agonising nightmares.

Next morning he received a letter from his old student-friend Hong-Tao :

“ My dear friend,

In your last letter, you tell me of your divorce. I approve and admire you. Modern youth, break heroically with the past.

“ A post in the revolutionary army is vacant. It is for you. Leave your apathetic parents, paralysed by a mass of imbecilities. Do not look back. Advance fearlessly. The mission of destruction awaits you.”

At mid-day, he was preparing light-heartedly for his departure.

Lu Siun

Con Y Ki



THE taverns in the market town of Lu were arranged in a very unusual manner : on the roadside was set up a broad, square-shaped counter, behind which was kept hot water, to warm up the wine as customers might wish. As evening came on, after their work, the workmen used to come there and drink, as they leaned up against the counter, a bowl of very hot wine, which refreshed them ; this cost four *cash*—that was the price more than twenty years ago, now it is ten times as much. For another *cash* one could break one's fast with a plate of bamboo buds cooked in salt, or beans done in fennel ; and, for ten *cash*, there was a splendid dish of meat. . . . But most of the customers wearing the short jacket, could not dream of offering themselves such a luxury as that. None but the long robes entered a room next door, and there, seated at their ease, this class of customers used to order wine and dishes which they ate with all dignity.

From the time I was twelve, I was waiter in the tavern of Han-Heng. The landlord had said to me: "You are too stupid, you don't know how to serve the customers in long robes, you go and look after the bar." The customers in jackets were not, as he supposed, less difficult; most of them were very talkative and bad-tempered; they often wanted to see the wine coming out of the jar with their own eyes, to examine closely whether there was any water at the bottom of the tankard, to watch over the hot-water operations . . . so that I had neither leisure nor skill to dilute the wine. A few days later the landlord, after scolding me for my stupidity, did not dismiss me at once, out of consideration for my protector, but reduced my work; I was to spend my whole time in warming up the wine.

From that time I used to stand all day behind the bar, chained to my monotonous task, by the side of my scowling-faced master, in front of the angry-voiced customers; when luckily the arrival of a certain Con y Ki brought me the opportunity and the liberty to laugh to my heart's content. He is a man whom I always recollect with pleasure.

Con y Ki was the only long-robed customer who drank standing. Very tall, he had a sallow face on which scars were marked by wrinkles; his beard was grey and shaggy. His robe, robe though it was, was so dirty, so worn, that it seemed to have known neither wash-tub nor

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mending for a good ten years. When he spoke, his mouth was crammed with the phrases of Confucian rhetoric which people could hardly understand. As his family name was Con, he was nick-named Con y Ki, since these three characters happened to be placed next each other in all the elementary copy-books, but this too was hardly understood by anyone. When Con y Ki drew near the bar, all the drinkers used to laugh in his face ; some would cry out :—" Con y Ki, have you had any fresh scars on your phiz, eh ? " He did not answer, but said quietly to the bar-men : " Two bowls of warm wine and a dish of beans in fennel ! " and he spread out nine big *cash* on the table.

The others twitted him loudly :—

" Have you been scrounging again somewhere ? "

Con y Ki, his eyes wide open, answered :

" Don't slander an honest man ! "

" Oh ! honest man ! the day before yesterday I saw you pilloried and beaten for stealing some books belonging to the Hos . . . eh ! "

Then, red-faced, the blue veins in his forehead swelling, Con y Ki protested :—

" Stealing books is not stealing. . . . Stealing books—that's a learned man's business : is that a theft ? "

Then followed a flood of Confucian maxims : " The wise wise man strengthens himself in poverty . . . " and an endless rigmarole

which made us all shout with laughter ; and gaiety filled the tavern.

Con y Ki, they said, had really studied, but had never managed to pass the preliminary examination. Knowing nothing of the art of living, he became poorer and poorer and was on the border-line of destitution. Luckily he was still a very good writer ; and by copying books for other people, he earned his bowl of rice. But an evil genius had got hold of him ; he drank a great deal and worked very little. Often, book, paper, brushes, ink—all vanished. And his customers began to leave him. Con y Ki was reduced of necessity to stealing occasionally little things which the Wise Man ought to disdain. But, in our tavern, his behaviour was always correct : he never let his debts run on for more than a month. Before that time had gone, one was sure of being able to cross off from the white slate the three characters Con y Ki.

When Con y Ki had half-emptied his bowl, his face, momentarily flushed, became sallow again ; and someone asked him :

“ Con y Ki, is it a fact that you know the alphabet ? ”

Without answering, Con y Ki contented himself with casting a look of contempt at his questioner.

“ If you really do know the letters, then why didn't you pick up the tiniest scrap of a mark at the exam. ? ”

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At these words, Con y Ki seemed much distressed. He looked all round with an empty gaze, his face was covered with invisible ashes, while from his mouth poured quivering words of rhetorical characters (Che, fu, ye Che . . .) this time totally unintelligible. Then everyone burst out laughing, and the tavern was invaded by gaiety. At such moments I could laugh at my ease, without having my ears boxed by the landlord. Often he himself put questions like that to Con y Ki, and gave the signal for laughter.

Con y Ki, seeing his words were out of place in such surroundings, preferred to address himself to children. One day, he asked me :

“Have you studied ? ”

I nodded slightly in answer.

“You have studied ! . . . Look, I am going to examine you a little. How do you write the word fennel ? ”

I thought : “Is a man who looks like a beggar worthy to examine me ? ” and turned away my head.

“You don’t know ? ” he continued, in a pleading tone. “See, I am going to teach you. It’s well worth while to keep these characters in your head ; they will help you to keep your accounts, when you are a landlord.”

I felt like laughing and getting cross, considering the vast distance which divided my work from the position of the landlord, and also because the last-named never put down

beans with fennel in his accounts. I muttered an answer :

“ Who needs your instruction ? That character is written in ten strokes, like this ! . . . ”

Con y Ki was overjoyed, and, tapping the counter with his long nails said, nodding his head :

“ Quite right, quite right ! . . . The character is written in four ways : do you know them ? ”

I was at the end of my patience ; and ran off, with a grimace. Con y Ki, dipping his nails in his wine, prepared to write on the counter ; and, seeing my lack of enthusiasm, he gave vent to a long sigh full of pity.

Sometimes, children, attracted by our shouts of laughter, gathered round Con y Ki. He distributed a bean to each of them. And they, after eating, did not leave him at once, but stood with their eyes glued to the plate.

Con y Ki, in alarm, covered his plate with his five fingers and leaning towards the little ones :

“ I haven’t much more, I haven’t much more,” he said. Then, drawing himself up to his full height, and looking lovingly at his beans, he declaimed in Confucius’ manner :

“ Not much, not much ! Then there are many? Now, there are not many.”

And the crowd of children scattered with shrieks of laughter.

Con y Ki was the life and soul of our party : but no one was worried by his absence.

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One day, a little before or after the mid-autumn festival (the 15th of the 8th moon), my landlord, who was making up his accounts, unhooked the white slate and said :

“It’s a long time since Con y Ki stopped coming : he still owes me nineteen *cash* !”

I was surprised that I had not noticed it sooner. One of the drinkers said :

“How could he come ? He has a broken leg.”

“Ah !” said the landlord.

“Con y Ki has no luck ; he met the hob-nails of Ting the M.A.¹ (Ting=hob-nail.) Blind indeed must the man be who tries to pilfer the tiniest bit of straw from the Ting family.”

“And what happened then ?”

“Then ? First, he made a written confession, then he was beaten, beaten until mid-night, and his leg was smashed up . . .”

The landlord, asking no more details, remained plunged in his figures.

After mid-autumn, the north wind, blowing colder and colder, brought on the winter. I was not very cold, since I had put on my cotton overcoat, and was always near the fire. One afternoon, when there were not many customers I was sitting dozing, when suddenly I heard a voice say “Warm up a bowl of wine.” It was a very low voice, but familiar. I looked : no one there. I got up, and glanced outside. Con

¹ There is no English equivalent for “agrégé,” which is the final examination for teachers in France and in China. (Note of translator.)

y Ki was sitting beneath the counter, on the ground, in front of the threshold. His blackened, wasted face gave him a pitiful appearance; he wore a torn double robe, which no longer covered his bare legs which were crossed on a mattress attached to his shoulder by string. Seeing me, he repeated:

“Warm up a bowl of wine!” And my master, leaning over the counter, said:

“Con y Ki, you still owe me nineteen *cash*.”

Con y Ki, raising his piteous face, replied:

“Oh, *that*—next time! But today it’s ready money. Some good wine.”

“Con y Ki, have you been scrounging again?” added my master, joking as usual.

Con y Ki no longer obstinately denied the charge; he answered simply:

“Don’t tease.”

“But this isn’t a jest: how did you break your leg?”

“I fell, I fell . . .” replied Con y Ki in a low voice, with imploring eyes which tried to say: “don’t insist.”

Meantime a crowd was gathering there, and laughing with my master. I brought him some warm wine and put him on the door-step. He took out of his pocket all in holes four big *cash* and passed them into the hollow of my hand. His hands were covered with mud: they served as feet nowadays. A moment after, having had his drink, he went away on his hands, amidst the laughter of the spectators.

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We did not see Con y Ki again. At the end of the year, the landlord unhooked his white slate and said :

“ Con y Ki still owes me nineteen *cash* ! ”

At Yoan-Yang (the festival of the fifth moon), in the following year, he said again :

“ Con y Ki still owes me nineteen *cash* ! ”

At the mid-autumn feast he insisted no longer. At the end of the year Con y Ki had still not appeared again. And to this day he has not appeared again.

Perhaps Con y Ki is really dead.

Lu Siun

The Tragedy of Ah Qui

CHAPTER I

HIS VICTORIES

Nor only are Ah Qui's name and forename, and the district he came from, all unknown: but nothing whatever is known of his past. To the villagers who live in Wi, he is simply a theme for jests, an aid in the hardest work; what does his past matter to them? He himself never mentions it. Only, occasionally, in the course of a quarrel, he mutters, with flashing eyes, the words:

"Once upon a time, we . . . far richer than you!"

Having no family, he lives in a dilapidated pagoda of the god of agriculture. He has no special craft, but takes on casual labour by the day; sometimes he is a reaper, sometimes he crushes rice, sometimes he is a pilot. Occasionally, when the work is likely to last for

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some time, the landlord keeps him at his house for a few days, and sends him away as soon as the task is finished. When anyone needs help, he thinks of him, or rather of what he can do ; otherwise, even his surname, Ah Qui, is forgotten, to say nothing of his antecedents. He was only noticed once in his life, and then by a sarcastic old man : " How hard Ah Qui works," said he, watching Ah Qui, who was in front of him, thin, bare-shouldered, scaring crows. The people who were there hardly perceived the irony which lay beneath the apparent praise ; but Ah Qui was filled with joy.

Ah Qui is proud. In his eyes, not one of the villagers is worth a brass farthing. He even raises his fingers rudely at the two candidates for matriculation. He knows that the Lord Tsien and the Lord Chao have a double claim to respect, first because they are rich and secondly as parents of the candidates ; but he does not think any more of them for that, for he thinks that *his* sons might be more highly considered than such people. The privilege he has enjoyed in having visited the town two or three times makes him still prouder. But he does not despise the town-dwellers any less : for instance, why do they cut up the onions so small when they fry fish ? . . . Certainly, they are wrong, they are absurd. Then, criticising the villagers, he thinks how rustic they are, how ridiculous and ignorant : they have never even seen the town way of frying fish !

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That is what Ah Qui is like ; once upon a time he was a perfect man, surrounded with luxury, proud of his farsightedness and clever at his work. Unluckily, he has a physical defect. He has had an inflammation on his head for no one knows how long. He does not, it seems, regard it as a good quality, for he avoids using the word "inflammation," and all its synonyms, and, by extension the words "light," "brilliant," "lamp," "candle" . . . If one risks one of these words in his presence, he sees red, and avenges himself bravely ; he strikes, or curses, as he judges his adversary to be weaker or less eloquent than himself. But, no one knows why, defeat always crashes upon Ah Qui's head. In the end, he looks for some other means of vengeance, and contents himself with an angry look.

Understanding his new method, the village idlers become more and more affable towards him. As soon as he approaches, they cry out with simulated surprise :

" Oh ! The lamp ! . . . "

Ah Qui gets annoyed, hurls a furious look at them.

" Oh ! What a light-house ! " they continue, fearlessly.

Powerless, Ah Qui flies to another source of vengeance.

" You are not even worthy to . . . "

Then his carbuncle seems as glorious as a halo ; but, as he is far-sighted, when on the

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very verge of uttering these holy words, he prefers to be silent.

The idlers, not content with amusing themselves at his expense in this way, always end by ill-treating him. They do not leave him alone till they have beaten him and, seizing his yellow pigtail, struck his head several times noisily against the wall. When his tormentors have gone, Ah Qui stays another moment without moving, and thinks : " I seem to be beaten by my sons. We live in a depraved age . . ." Then he goes off himself, content with his spiritual victory.

When he gets his wages, he hastens to gamble them away.

CHAPTER II

CONTINUATION OF HIS VICTORIES

One spring day, as Ah Qui left the tavern and walked into the road with tottering steps, he saw beneath a wall, lit up by a ray of sunshine, gaffer Wang the Hairy, his arms bare, sitting on the ground, hunting for fleas. Gaffer Wang was bald, but had a flowing beard. They called him Wang the Bald-haired. Ah Qui, gladly neglecting the adjective " bald," used to call him simply Wang the Hairy. He reckoned baldness a very ordinary thing, but the collar of beard a very ugly thing. However, he sat

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down beside him, which he would never have dared to do with any other unemployed person.¹ Indeed, it was honouring this worm to sit by his side.

Ah Qui unbuttoned his double jacket and, in his turn, started to investigate. But, whether from carelessness, or because he had recently changed his jacket, he only found three or four fleas there, while Wang the Hairy was putting them in his mouth two or three at a time, and cracking them noisily. Another defeat which filled Ah Qui with rancour!

His blood boiled, and he threw his jacket to the ground.

"Worm!" he said, emitting a long jet of saliva.

"Mangy cur, who are you talking to?" said Wang the Hairy, casting at him a look of the utmost contempt.

What? Did a monster with a collar of beard defy him? It was a splendid chance to show his courage.

"If the cap fits . . ."

He got up, arms akimbo.

"Are your bones itching, knave?" replied Wang the Hairy, getting up himself, and putting on his jacket.

Ah Qui, thinking that his adversary was about to run away, hurled himself upon him, with clenched fist raised. But soon he tottered,

¹ "Unemployed" in Chinese is a synonym of "wise." (Note of J. B. Kyn yn Yu.)

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seized and carried off his feet by Wang the Hairy, who caught hold of his yellow pigtail from behind, and pulled his head towards the wall.

"A Wise Man ought only to use his lips, and never use force," protested Ah Qui, with bent head, protecting the roots of his yellow hair with both hands.

Possibly Wang the Hairy was not a Wise Man, for he none the less banged Ah Qui's head several times against the wall, threw him down a yard in front of him, and then went off in triumph.

It was one of the most degrading adventures of Ah Qui's life.

He stood there, in perplexity.

He saw in the distance another of his enemies approaching, the one he hated most, the Lord Tsien's son, who, after spending six months in Japan, had come back without a pigtail. His mother had often wept over this appalling loss; three times his wife had tried to throw herself down a well. The mother used often to tell how wicked men had made her son drunk and cut his hair; but for that accident, he might have become a great mandarin, and the whole family was eagerly waiting for the noble hair to grow again. Ah Qui was not caught by this excuse. He called him mentally, every time he saw him: "False European Devil." The thing he detested most in him was his false pigtail. No doubt, the wife of False

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European Devil could not be chaste, since she did not make a fourth attempt to throw herself down a well.

"There goes False European Devil!" he muttered, in revenge.

Hearing this, False European Devil rushed at him, brandishing his varnished cane, his funeral stick, as Ah Qui called it. Ah Qui, feeling that he was about to be beaten, raised his arms, drew in his neck, and waited. After the first storm of blows had passed over his head, he regained courage:

"I was speaking to *him* . . .," he stammered, pointing haphazardly to an urchin who was passing.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The beating calmed his wrath a little. Forgetfulness, his hereditary treasure, was his best remedy. He went off slowly; as he drew near the tavern he recovered his normal contentment.

Meantime a little priestess happened to pass. At the sight of one whom he had never allowed to pass without an insult, Ah Qui was seized again with the desire for vengeance. "I did not know that all my ill-luck today came from you," he thought. He went towards her and spat in her face.

The little priestess, pretending not to feel anything, went on walking, with bowed head. Ah Qui caught her up, and passed his hand over her newly shaven head:

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"Little devil, go back at once, the priest is waiting for you!" he said, with a stupid laugh.

And the priestess fled, and the drinkers laughed. Ah Qui was triumphant: he had avenged the insults of Wang the Hairy and the European Devil. He felt light, as if he had suddenly grown wings.

"That accursed Ah Qui will never have any children!" called the plaintive voice of the priestess in the distance.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Ah Qui, in triumph.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the drinkers, also triumphing.

CHAPTER III

HIS LOVE-AFFAIRS

It is said: "There are great conquerors who, to win greater glory, desire their enemies to be like the tiger, the eagle, almost invincible. There are great conquerors who after killing or subduing their equals, are miserable because they no longer have either enemies or friends, and suffer from their noble solitude . . ." But our friend Ah Qui never had such vain disquietude; he was always contented; he possessed in the highest possible degree the genius of Chinese spirituality . . .

He could not sleep that night. He still felt

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beneath his fingers the priestess' tender skin. He could still hear the plaintive but gentle voice saying: "that accursed Ah Qui will never have any children!" Yes, he needed a wife, to procreate children, for he had often heard the learned say that the greatest of filial impieties was the failure to procreate. "Woman, woman," he thought.

In this, he was in conformity with the doctrine of the "Sages." But the thought of women ruined him. So a woman was something pernicious! He thought of the rules which the "Sages" had drawn up: of the inviolable barrier between the two sexes. He even attempted to fight against superstition: the priestess and False European Devil. This was his philosophy: every priestess sins with a priest; every woman who walks in the street leads an evil life; every conversation between a man and a woman ends inevitably in adultery. To punish them, he never failed to look angrily at them, or to humiliate them by allegorical sayings, or even, if it was dark, to throw pebbles at them.

He always eyed women who seemed to him to have wanton intentions; but they never smiled at him. He paid the most malicious attention to women who spoke to him; but they never said what he hoped to hear. He loathed them; they were hypocrites.

One day, Ah Qui, after crushing rice all day, was smoking his foul pipe after supper in the

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kitchen. At the Lord Chao's it was the custom to go to bed immediately after supper, without lighting the lamps, except on two special occasions : first, when the future bachelor was preparing for his examination, and secondly when Ah Qui came to crush rice and continued his work in the evening. So, Ah Qui, during the interval, was indolently smoking in the kitchen.

Mother W, who acted as housekeeper, maid, and cook for the Chaos, sat down on a bench, after washing up the bowls, and began to talk to Ah Qui :—

“ The mistress has eaten nothing for two days, because our Lord has taken it into his head to have a concubine . . . ”

“ Woman . . . Mother W, the cursed widow . . . woman,” thought Ah Qui.

“ Our young mistress will be delivered in the coming eighth month,” went on the old dame.

“ Woman,” thought Ah Qui. He laid down his pipe and got up.

“ Our little mistress . . . ” went on the old dame, paying no attention.

“ I will sleep with you, I will sleep with you ! ” Ah Qui hurled himself towards her and fell on his knees.

After a momentary silence, Mother W, getting over her terror, began by trembling, then called out, ran away shrieking, and ended by bursting into tears.

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Ah Qui stayed another moment kneeling against the wall, astounded himself too, and then, leaning his elbows on the empty bench, got up slowly. He felt vaguely that he had done something stupid. His heart was rather heavy; he pushed his pipe into his trousers pocket, and was preparing to crush some more rice, when he felt several crashing blows on his head. Turning round, he saw in front of him the bachelor, with a big stick in his hand. "So you are rebelling, imbecile." And the blows redoubled in intensity. Ah Qui covered his head with both hands, got his fingers hurt, and hurried out of the kitchen, after a final kick in the back.

"*Wang pa tan*, vile abortion!" growled the bachelor, pompously, behind him.

In the milling room, Ah Qui, alone, standing, his fingers still hurting, meditated on that mandarin curse, *Wang pa tan*, which he had only heard used by magistrates on the bench, and which had made a deep impression on him. Then, no more sensuality; he was enjoying to the full the feeling of well-being which always followed blows and curses. He crushed away till the sweat poured off him. He stopped working, unbuttoned and took off his overcoat.

He heard a disturbance outside. Always a lover of rows, he made for the place to which his ears guided him. When he reached an interior court-yard, he saw, in the twilight, a

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tumultuous crowd. Gradually he made out the mistress who had not eaten for two days, the neighbour, the seventh sister-in-law Tseou, the parents of the white-eyed Chaos, and Chao se Chen.

The young mistress had just pushed Mother W from her room, saying :

“ Go outside a little, mother ; don't hide any longer in your room thinking of your shame.”

“ Everyone is convinced of your chastity. . . Avoid a dreadful suicide,” added the seventh sister-in-law Tseou.

But Mother W did nothing but weep, snivelling words that no one could understand.

Ah Qui said to himself : “ Ha ! how funny women are ! This widow-creature will give us some good sport ! ” In order to hear better, he was drawing near Chao se Chen, when he saw the Lord Chao raise his big stick and run at him. Remembering that he had been beaten, and that that had had something to do with all this commotion, he turned on his heel to go to the milling-room, but the stick cut off his retreat. He turned back and went out by the back door. A short time afterwards he was in his pagoda.

That evening, a spring evening, it was cool ; Ah Qui was cold. He remembered that he had forgotten his overcoat at the Lord Chao's. He would have liked to ask for it back, but was afraid of the blows of the stick.

Meanwhile in came the Mayor of the village.

“ Scoundrel of an Ah Qui ! What ? Do you

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dare to assault a servant of the Lords Chao? You are a rebel! To think of my sleep being interrupted by a thing like you!"

Before this violent and unceasing tirade, Ah Qui remained silent. Custom had decreed that every time the mayor was called in a fine of two hundred *cash* had to be paid, and, after nightfall, this was doubled. To get this amount, Ah Qui was obliged to pawn his cap. And five more conditions were imposed on him: first, Ah Qui was to go the next day to the Lord Chao's and apologise, taking with him a pair of red candles, weighing a pound; second, Ah Qui was to pay the cost of the Taoist incantations (which the family of Chao would have to carry out to exorcise the evil spirits); third, Ah Qui was never to cross the Chao's doorstep again; fourth, if any harm came to Mother W, Ah Qui was to bear the responsibility; fifth, Ah Qui was never to ask for his wages or his overcoat.

As the warmth came back with the spring, Ah Qui did not hesitate to sell his rug for two thousand *cash*, the greater part of which he spent in paying his fines, and the rest in drink. Instead of lighting the candles at once, the Chao family kept them for the day on which the mistress would adore Buddha. As to Ah Qui's overcoat, a good part of it served to make swaddling-clothes for the little lady's new-born baby, and the torn part made slippers for Mother W.

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CHAPTER IV

AH QUI EARNS HIS BREAD

After this humiliation, Ah Qui retired to his pagoda. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon. Ah Qui looked at his bare arms ; he was cold. He remembered his double cape, forgotten underneath the bed ; he covered his body with it and went to sleep. Next morning, when he woke, he saw the sun already empurpling the western wall. He sat up, saying : “ Gosh ! ”

He wandered into the street. Something was changed in the world. The women fled, suddenly, as he approached, and ran to hide behind their doors ; among the fugitives, he made out the seventh sister-in-law Tseou, a person already middle-aged, dragging her eleven-year-old daughter with her. Ah Qui was astonished : “ Why do these women begin to play at being girls ? They are hypocrites ! ”

Little by little he noticed round him other changes of a still more tiresome kind. The inn-keeper no longer let him have wine on credit ; the porter at the pagoda often cursed him, and wanted to drive him away ; for longer than he could compute, no one wanted his services. Against the tavern he had his abstinence ; against the porter, a dull patience ; but against hunger, the consequence of the boycott by his patrons, what was he to do ?

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Except for the house of the Chaos, whose doorstep he had no longer the right to cross, he could go to any of the others; but from every house which he approached came a man, with angry looks, waving his hands to keep him off, as people drive away a beggar: "There's nothing; clear off!"

Ah Qui could not understand why no one wanted workmen any more. He spied out the land. His old patrons now turned to little Don. This man was thin, weak, and in Ah Qui's opinion, inferior to Wang the Hairy. Who would have thought he was the one who was to steal Ah Qui's bowl of rice? Ah Qui now felt a bitter anger. Often, while wandering in the streets, he would suddenly raise his hand and sing the theatrical refrain:

I brandish the whip of steel to smite thee.

Some days after, in front of the Tsien's door, he met little Don. He leapt at him, calling him "beast." Don stopped, timidly, gazing at Ah Qui. Having no whip of steel, Ah Qui contented himself with catching hold of his enemy's pigtail. Little Don, protecting his hair with one hand, tried to grab Ah Qui's with the other, and forced him to defend himself with his free hand. Ah Qui, famished and thin, had lost his superiority over little Don: they were now about equal in strength. For about half-an-hour, they formed a blue rainbow, decorating the white wall of the Tsien family.

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“Go on ! Go on !” said the spectators.

“Bravo ! Bravo !” called others.

At last, both worn out, they let go of each other, and made a way through the crowd, hurling at each other, as a farewell, an oath and a scowl of hatred. So ended the battle, leaving the victory indecisive, and the curiosity of the spectators unsatisfied. But, none the less, no one thought of asking for Ah Qui's services.

Summer was coming on. Ah Qui sold his garments one after another and so put off famine for some days. After that, he was pulled up short, face to face with hunger. He prowled round the ruined pagoda, searched the four bare earthen walls of his rooms, felt his bed all over, hoping to find a buried treasure ; but alas ! there was nothing. He was compelled to travel to get food.

It was fine, that day. The wine in the taverns smelt good ; the rolls steamed. And he passed them by, passed them by.

At the end of the village was an expanse of undulating green fields, thinly flecked with moving black dots, the figures of labourers. Ah Qui, who lacked any sense of the beauty of the countryside, only felt that his livelihood lay in a far distant place. He at last reached the enclosure within which stood the pagoda of the Silent Worship.

The white walls of the pagoda sprang up from the midst of a green carpet of plants ; behind, the walls were low and over them could be seen

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a kitchen garden. Ah Qui hesitated a moment, and looked round him; there was no one to be seen. Clinging to the ivy, he climbed the wall; earth fell down beneath his trembling feet. He landed on his feet in the verdure of the garden. There was no wine, no cakes, there. A thicket of bamboos on the west, rape plants in full seed, charlock in flower, cabbages which had bolted. He was about to despair when he saw in front of him a plot of ground planted with turnips. As he bent down to pull some up, he saw through the half-open door of the sitting-room, the shaven head of the little priestess, which soon disappeared. The priestess was only worthy of Ah Qui's contempt. But in this world "one has to put up with a great deal"; so he hastened to uproot four turnips, strip off the leaves and put them in his pocket. Already the old priestess was running up.

"Hi there! Buddha! What are you doing in this orchard stealing turnips? . . . What a crime! . . . Hi there! Buddha!"

"But an Ah Qui never steals," he retorted, turning on his heel, "if they are yours, call them, and they will answer!"

He had hardly said these words when he began to run, for the big black dog which belonged to the pagoda had rushed for him. The barking drew nearer and threatened his legs when a turnip fell from Ah Qui's clothes, and this hindered the dog. Profiting by this

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relief, Ah Qui was able to climb a tree near the wall, on to which he clambered ; turnips and man fell with a crash on the other side. And the dog continued to bark up at the tree, and the old priestess to invoke her Buddha.

CHAPTER V

AH QUI RETRIEVES HIS LOSSES

In the following autumn, the villagers saw Ah Qui again, but in a very different condition. It was dark. Ah Qui, his eyes heavy with sleep, appeared before the tavern counter, extracted a handful of small change from his pocket, and threw it down on the counter, calling :

“ Here’s some ready money ! Wine !

He wore a new double robe, and a big wallet, which seemed heavy, hung from the belt of his trousers. There was a wide difference between the old Ah Qui with his torn cap and the Ah Qui of today in his new clothes. In the waiter, the landlord, the drinkers, the passers-by, he imposed respect and fear. The landlord hastened to salute him and enter into conversation with him.

“ Oh ! Ah Qui, here you are back again ! ”

“ Yes, here I am ! ”

“ Wealth ! Wealth ! You have been . . ? ”

“ In the town, of course ! ”

By his own account, Ah Qui had worked for

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the Lord M.A. It was enough to say the "Lord M.A.," to know that the Lord Pe was meant, for there was only one M.A. within a hundred miles. It was a very honourable thing to be able to work for so great a lord. But Ah Qui declared that he was dissatisfied with the extraordinary manners of the Lord M.A. ; so he had left him.

The people who were listening, and seemed to sympathise with him, were at bottom very well pleased, for they considered Ah Qui unworthy of such an honour.

Ah Qui told them all the wonders of the town : the games of Matsiang, the law-courts, decapitation ; he enchanted the ignorant people ; he posed as an expert.

"Have you ever seen a head cut off?" he said. "It is a funny sight. In the town, they cut off the heads of revolutionaries ; if only you had seen it, it is so funny !"

He shook his head, spurring a jet of saliva in the face of Chao se Chen, who was in front of him. Everyone was afraid. Suddenly Ah Qui lifted his right hand, and struck Wang the Hairy, who was listening with head stretched out, on the nape of his neck :

"Crack ! Just like that !"

Wang the Hairy had no time to draw his head back, and felt the effects of the blow and of panic for a long time. After this, he did not dare to go near Ah Qui, nor did the other villagers.

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In the villagers' estimation, Ah Qui was now, if not more eminent than the Lord Chao, at any rate at least as highly respected.

A little later, Ah Qui's name invaded the harems. It is true that in the whole village, except for the houses of the Tsiens and the Chaos which were large and deep, and had harems worthy of the name, the others were so small that they hardly concealed the women's apartments. But, appearances notwithstanding, every harem was something impenetrable, mysterious. Now, whenever the women met, it was inevitably to discuss this fact: the seventh sister-in-law Tseou had bought from Ah Qui a blue silk skirt, old, it is true, but it has only cost her nine *kios*; the mother of Chao with the white eyes had bought for the baby, for three hundred *cash*, a robe of scarlet European gauze, three parts new. . . . Now, they no longer avoided Ah Qui; far from it. When he passed they went up to him and asked him:

"Ah Qui, have you any skirts left? No? And robes? Yes?"

From the little harems the rumour gradually reached the big ones. The seventh sister-in-law Tseou had not failed to parade in her silk skirt before Mistress Chao, who had then talked enthusiastically about it to her lord. In the evening, during supper, the Lord Chao had a long discussion with his son the bachelor about the dubious conduct of Ah Qui.

"We must look to our doors and windows!"

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. . . But Ah Qui must still have some fine things to sell . . .”

As Madam happened to want to buy a fur waistcoat, it was decided to ask the seventh sister-in-law Tseou to go and look for Ah Qui. And, in these exceptional circumstances, they lit a colza oil lamp.

The oil was getting low ; Ah Qui did not come. The Chaos began to get worried, some at the sister-in-law's negligence, others at Ah Qui's timidity. But the Lord Chao, who, sure of his authority, “wished” that Ah Qui should come, was right : in the end, preceded by the seventh sister-in-law Tseou, who was still chattering, Ah Qui appeared and stood in the doorway of the sitting-room, with a stupid air.

“Hail, Lord !” he said.

“Ah Qui, they say you are getting rich in the town,” said the Lord Chao, looking him up and down. “Good . . . but, if you still have any fripperies . . . I should like . . .”

“I have already told the sister-in-law Tseou that I have no more.”

“No more ! . . . I don't believe it.”

“The things belonged to my friends, but there were not many. All have been bought. . . . Now, I have only a curtain left.”

“Well, show us the curtain,” interrupted Madam.

“I will bring it to you tomorrow . . .”

The Lord Chao made a grimace.

“Ah Qui, when you have anything good, you

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will show it to us first, I will pay as much as anyone else."

"I want a fur waistcoat," added Madam.

Ah Qui promised, and went away carelessly.

The bachelor was more indignant than anyone at this insult. He would have liked to have had Ah Qui turned out by the mayor, if he had not been prevented by his father, who told him that the enmity of such people was to be feared, and that "The eagle does not seek his prey near his own nest." Then, they warned the seventh sister-in-law Tseou to say nothing about the meeting.

But next day, she had her skirt dyed yellow, and spread abroad Ah Qui's dubious behaviour, taking care all the same not to add that the bachelor had intended to drive him out.

The mayor went to Ah Qui's house to get the curtain and made him promise to pay him so much a month. The respect of the villagers changed into fear. To the idlers who tried to make his acquaintance, he told the whole story proudly. Then they learned that Ah Qui had been only a second-rate thief, incapable of climbing a wall or breaking into a house, fit only to receive stolen goods outside, and that one night, having heard voices raised in the house which his companions had entered, he had fled from the town to the village, not daring to continue his craft. . . . After this, they felt neither respect nor fear for him, but only contempt.

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CHAPTER VI

THE REVOLUTION

On the fourteenth of September in the year Hui-tong, (on the day before, Ah Qui had sold his wallet to Chao of the white eyes), at the third stroke of the cymbal, that is at three o'clock in the morning, in the blackness of night, while the village was asleep, a junk with a grey bridge passed, touched at the Chao's landing-stage, and then disappeared as dawn began to break. It seemed that people had noticed it, for it was talked about mysteriously.

The junk carried terror into the village. By mid-day, public opinion was full of it. The mission of the junk, the Chao kept secret. But that did not prevent talk in all the tea-shops and taverns of how the revolutionaries had entered the town and how the M.A. had fled and taken refuge in the village. The sister-in-law Tseou, it is true, told everyone she met that it was only some boxes of old clothes which the Lord M.A. had left with the Lord Chao, and that the latter had sent them away at once, since he had never had anything to do with the M.A. None the less, this assertion could be refuted by explaining that the Lord M.A. had not come in person, but had written a long letter to the Chao asking them to become friends with him, and that Chao, after weighing the pros

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and cons had at last agreed to keep the trunks under Madam's bed. As to the revolutionaries, it was known that they had entered the town that night, all wearing the helmet and white armour: signs of mourning for the last emperor of the Ming dynasty.

Ah Qui had already heard the revolutionaries talked about; he had also seen some of them beheaded. He had always hated the revolutionaries with whom for some extraordinary reason, he associated the adjective "rebel," which offended the ear more than the word "thief." But now, seeing that these revolutionaries had managed to terrify the illustrious Lord M.A. himself, he was filled with respectful enthusiasm; on the other hand, the frightened, restless behaviour of the wretched villagers filled him with joy—"Bravo! Revolution!" he thought. "Revolution against these loathsome people! . . . I myself would like to submit to the revolutionaries."

That day he had drunk a little too much wine, and was striding down the street, following up the thread of his revolutionary ideas; he imagined himself become a revolutionary, and holding the villagers his prisoners. He could not prevent himself saying:

"Revolt; ah! ha! revolt!"

Everyone looked at him, terrified, pitiable, and this encouraged the drunkard.

"Bravo," he went on, with more enthusiasm. "Everyone's property is mine! All the

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beauties are mine ! . . . *Tong ! tong ! Chang ! chang !*¹ *I repent of having killed wrongfully, in a drunken fit, my good brother Chen. . . . I repent, Ha ! ha ! ha ! Tong ! tong ! chang ! chang ! Tu ! chang-li chang ! I brandish the whip of steel to smite thee !* ”

At the Chao's door, two men were discussing the revolution. Ah Qui paid no attention to them, and went on :

“ *Tong ! tong !* ”

“ Father Qui,” called the Lord Chao, respectfully and fearfully.

“ *Chang ! Chang !* ”

Ah Qui, far from imagining that the epithet “ father ” could ever accompany his name, thought that they were addressing someone else, and took up his chant again : “ *Tu ! Chang ! Chang-li Chang ! Chang !* ”

“ Gaffer Qui ! ”

“ *Chang-li Chang ! . . .* ”

“ Ah Qui ! ”

The bachelor was compelled to shout only his bare name. At last Ah Qui stopped, and turning his head a little, he asked : “ What's the matter ? ”

“ Father Qui . . . at the moment . . . ” ; the Lord Chao stopped, sought for the right word, and went on : “ At the moment . . . you are getting rich . . . ”

“ Rich ! Yes ! Everything is mine ! ”

“ Ah ! Brother Qui, we, your poor friends,

¹ These words, and all those in italics, are a theatrical refrain.

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are not in any danger, are we?" interrupted Chao with the white eyes, in a timid voice, as if trying to sound the intentions of a revolutionary.

"*Poor* friend? You're richer than I!"

So saying, Ah Qui went off.

They stayed there, miserable, silent. That night, the Chaos, father and son, lit a lamp to discuss things. Chao with the white eyes took off the wallet which hung at his side and made his wife hide it at the bottom of their chest.

Ah Qui, back in his pagoda, that evening, was well treated by the porter, who offered him tea, two cakes, and four candles. He drank the tea, ate the cakes, and lit a candle; at sight of the dancing flame his imagination also began to dance. Revolutionaries wearing helmets and white armour, armed with axes, steel whips, European cannon, sickles, cross-bows, defile past the pagoda of the god of agriculture and call out to him: "Ah Qui, come with us!" And he goes off with them.

He mocks at the suppliant air of the cursed villagers who fall on their knees before him, crying: "Ah Qui, save us!" He is hard to please. The first to be killed are little Don, the Lord Chao, the bachelor, False European Devil. . . . Do you want to cut off any more heads? . . . Wang the Hairy might be pardoned—but Ah Qui would oppose it. . . . Wealth! . . . He walks straight in, opens his trunk: gold, silver, dollars, satin clothing . . .

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the Limpong bed which belongs to the bachelor's wife he has put in his pagoda, and by it he places the Tsien's table, or else, perhaps, the Chaos'. He does not work any more : he has only to order little Don to carry them ; the brute must be quick about it or he will be beaten. . . . Chao se Chen's sister is ugly. The wife of False European Devil who sleeps with a man without hair is horrible. Mother W has not put in an appearance for a long time, where can she be ? . . . But her feet are too big.

He had no time to finish his dream. The red, wavering flame of the unfinished candle lit up the gaping mouth and the snoring nose of the drunkard.

Next morning, he got up very late. The street was peaceful as usual ; nothing was changed. None the less he was hungry ; he sought some means of getting food, but found none. But suddenly he made up his mind. He went, with deliberate gait, straight on towards the pagoda of the Silent Worship.

There, he saw the pagoda in the same condition as last spring ; white walls, polished door shut. He hesitated another moment and then knocked on the door. Within, a dog barked ; quickly Ah Qui picked up some brick-bats, and knocked still more loudly, till he almost broke through the black varnish on the door, when there was a sound of footsteps approaching.

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Ah Qui, armed with his brick-bats, his trembling legs wide apart, got ready for a desperate struggle with the dog. But the door was only just opened, and on the other side appeared, not the dog, but only the head of the old priestess.

"Is someone else coming?" she called out, in terror.

"Revolution . . . do you know that?" declaimed Ah Qui, in an idiotic tone which he tried vainly to make important.

"Revolution! Revolution! We've already been revolutionised. How much more do you want to revolutionise us?" said the old priestess, her eyes red.

"What?" said Ah Qui, in surprise.

"You don't know that they have already been to revolutionise us?"

"Who?"

"The bachelor and the European Devil!"

Ah Qui was astounded. Perceiving his discomfiture, the priestess quickly shut the door again. Ah Qui pushed it vainly, knocked—all was silent.

That morning, the bachelor Chao, having heard the news of how the revolutionaries had entered the town, had rolled his pigtail round his head and gone to visit the European Devil, Tsien, whose company he had never sought till then. As they were at a period where "Everything was being reborn," they understood each other like pickpockets at a fair, and

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agreed to revolutionise the village. After long discussions, they remembered that there was in the pagoda of the Silent Worship a dragon tablet with the inscription "Long live the King of ten thousand years, ten thousand times ten thousand years," which must be attacked first. They went off there at once, and, as the old priestess muttered some abuse, they punished her severely with blows of their sticks, taking her for the Manchu government in person. The priestess, after their departure, wept over the broken dragon tablet which lay on the floor, and wept, too, for the tripod of the goddess Kwan-yn, which had disappeared.

Ah Qui did not learn all this till later. He repented of having slept too long ; none the less he was indignant because they had not come and called for him. But, tolerant soul, he thought : " Perhaps they do not yet know that I have submitted to the revolutionaries ? "

CHAPTER VII

REVOLUTION IS FORBIDDEN

Little by little, peace returned to the village. It was quite true, people said, that the revolutionaries had invaded the town, but they did not make a great commotion there. The Lord Judge kept his place, the Lord M.A. was appointed to some office or other, and the

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Sergeant was the same, too. The annoying thing was that a number of unprincipled revolutionaries who had got mixed up in the business, from the day after their entrance, were making all the people who went to market cut their hair. The barge-boy, they said, had undergone this misadventure, and come out shaven, not looking like a man any longer. But this was not enough to frighten the villagers who rarely had any occasion to go to the town. And Ah Qui himself would gladly have avoided doing so. But there was, all the same, something changed in the village: one could notice that the number of those who rolled their pigtails round their heads increased day by day; among them, Mong the Prudent was first, then came Chao se Chen, and then Chao of the white eyes, and, last of all, Ah Qui.

When Chao se Chen was seen coming, with shaven neck, no one could help crying out:

“There goes a revolutionary!”

Ah Qui had heard it said that the bachelor had tied up his pigtail, but he had not thought that he might do so too. But when he had seen Chao se Chen do it recently, the idea of imitating him came to him. He tried to knot his hair on his head, with a bamboo pin, undid it again, tied it up once more, hesitated a long time, and at last risked walking out bravely in that guise. He noticed carefully all who watched him pass, but they said nothing; their indifference displeased him, and even irritated him.

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His temperament became gloomy, although life was in reality less difficult for him than before the revolution: he was treated more politely, the tavern no longer demanded ready money from him; but a revolution was worth more than that. Above all, he burst with indignation when, one day, he saw little Don. Little Don, too, had rolled up his pigtail on his head, and, in addition, had stuck in a bamboo pin. Ah Qui had never dreamed that the little fool could be so audacious, and he would never have allowed it! He wanted to stop him, to break his pin, to put his pigtail in its proper place, and to box his ears three times, the due punishment for his crime of forgetting the eight characters of his birth and degrading the revolution. But he forgave him all the same, and contented himself with looking him up and down furiously, and spitting at him, pursing his lips.

In these critical times, the European Devil was the only one who went to the town. The bachelor Chao would much have liked to go and see the M.A., in whom, since he had had the honour of looking after his boxes, he would have found a support, but the fear of losing his hair restrained him. He only begged the European Devil to offer him a respectful salute and a letter written in the classic style. When he came back, the European Devil, in consideration of four dollars paid on the spot by the bachelor, offered him and pinned on his

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coat a silver-plated medal. The citizens marvelled at it, and vied with each other in relating how the bachelor had received a decoration from the party of Sorb Oil,¹ resembling that of a doctor in the king's time. . . . The Lord Chao was even prouder of it than he had been when his son had passed his bachelor's examination; everyone, even Ah Qui, the revolutionary, became the object of his disdain.

Ah Qui, annoyed because they did not honour him enough, seeing his prestige fall lower and lower, ended by discovering, when he heard of the conferment of the plated decoration, this important revolutionary axiom: to be a revolutionary, it was not enough to say that he had submitted to the revolutionaries; it was not enough to roll his pigtail round his head; it was necessary also to seek their company. He had only known two, one of whom had been . . . crack! . . . beheaded, and the other was none other than False European Devil. So he was obliged to go and submit to him.

The 'Tsiens' door was wide open. Ah Qui crept in with short, timid steps. Once inside, he was surprised to see standing in the court, False European Devil, a plated decoration hanging from his chest, the hateful stick in his hand, his pigtail which had already grown again as far as his shoulders, undone and

¹ That is, from the party of "Liberty," which was to them a strange neologism, which they confounded with its homonym *Che Yu* (oil of sorb). (Note of J. B. Kyn yn Yu.)

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tangled, making him look like the portrait of the immortal Liu-hai . . . ; and in front of him were Chao with the white eyes, and three other idlers, listening full of admiration and respect.

Ah Qui approached quietly, hid behind Chao with the white eyes, hesitated, was much embarrassed in the choice of a suitable form of address ; he could not any longer call him False European Devil, or European man, or revolutionary . . . , but perhaps best of all would be Sir European.

Sir European did not notice him, absorbed in his oration.

“ Now *I* was in a hurry ; every time I saw him I said to him : Brother Hong ! let us get to work. He always answered : *Not*—that is a European word which you do not understand—otherwise we should have certainly succeeded. But that was precisely his discretion. He invited me three times to go to Hupe ; but I would not consent. That town is too small for enterprises so important as mine . . .

“ Oh ! . . . the . . . ”

Profiting by the interval, Ah Qui collected all his coward's courage, opened his mouth, and said nothing. He did not yet dare to call him “ Sir European.”

But at the sound of his voice, the four listeners turned round in surprise. Only then did Sir European notice him.

“ What ? What do you want ? ”

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“ I . . . ”

“ Get out, quickly.”

“ I want to submit . . . ”

“ Get out, get out ! ” said Sir European, brandishing his funeral stick.

Chao with the white eyes and the idlers called out together :

“ The gentleman tells you to get out ; have you the right to disobey him ? ”

Ah Qui, instinctively putting his hand up to his head to defend himself, went out unwillingly ; luckily he was not pursued. After running some thirty yards, he slackened his pace ; grief that was near to despair filled his heart ; what could he do, what resource was there left, since False European Devil did not allow him to be a revolutionary ? The champions with helmets and white armour would never again come and call him ! Farewell to his ambitions ! Farewell to his happiness ! More than that : the news would spread, little Don and Wang the Hairy would mock at him, though this was a less important misfortune.

For the first time, as it seemed to him, he felt utterly desolate. He no longer thought he had been reasonable to tie up his pigtail. He would have liked to let it down again at once, to revenge himself. But he did not do so. He wandered about until nightfall, drank another two bowls of wine, recovered his enthusiasm, and saw once more, in thought, some fragments of helmets and white armour.

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One day when he had (as usual) stayed in the tavern until it closed at a late hour, he went home slowly. As he went, suddenly, pif! paf! he heard a queer noise which did not sound like fireworks. He went and watched in a dark corner, he who was usually so curious and loved to be involved in everything. The noise of footsteps drew near; he was listening attentively, when suddenly a man who seemed to be fleeing, ran up and passed beside him. Immediately, Ah Qui turned and followed the fugitive. The man turned off; Ah Qui turned too. After turning and twisting, the man stopped; Ah Qui stopped too. Behind him, there was no one; in front was little Don.

"What's the matter?" said Ah Qui in an angry tone.

"The family of Chao . . . , Chao . . . has been robbed!" replied the other, panting.

Ah Qui felt his heart leap into his mouth. Little Don, after speaking, took to flight again. Ah Qui ran and stopped several times. As a man of the "craft," he was not so timid as the others; he stood and watched at a bend in the road; he seemed to hear a murmur in the distance, and to see a troop of champions with helmets and white armour, carrying off magnificent plunder, chests, furniture, the Limpong bed belonging to the bachelor's young wife, until he could not believe his eyes. But then, instead of going on, he went back home.

He shut the pagoda door tight, groped his

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way into his room, lay for a long time on his bed before he could master his emotion ; then he thought of his own interests : the champions with helmets and white armour have arrived, certainly, but they have not summoned him, they have taken rich booty in which he had had no share. . . . It's because the accursed European Devil did not allow him to revolutionise ! Ah Qui, getting more and more annoyed, ended by uttering the following curse, accentuating it with vigorous shakes of his head :

“ Is it only lawful for you to rebel, you pig of a European Devil ? . . . Well then, rebel ! Rebellion is a crime for which men lose their heads. One day, I will summon you before the Lord Judge, so that I may see your head cut off in the town . . . and all your family's heads cut off too . . . crack ! crack ! ”

CHAPTER VIII

AU REVOIR

After the incident of the burglary, the villagers were pleased and restless ; our friend Ah Qui was pleased and restless too.

Four days later, in the dead of night, a troop of civic guards, of policemen, arrived secretly in the village, surrounded the pagoda of the god of agriculture, set up a machine-gun and trained it on the gate. They loudly summoned

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Ah Qui to come out. A long silence and perfect stillness was the only answer. The sergeant, becoming impatient, promised two thousand *cash* for his capture ; then two bold militia-men, braving the danger, climbed the wall and opened the door ; they all plunged in and dragged out Ah Qui, barely sober.

About mid-day, they reached the town. Ah Qui found himself taken to a tumbledown house, and there, after going through several passages, he was thrown into a tiny room. Hardly had he got in when the heavy door, which had a grille in the middle, shut behind him. At the far end, close to the wall, deep in shadow, he saw two other proletarians like himself.

Ah Qui, although a little sad, was not very vexed, for this room was not worse than the one in the pagoda. He gradually got acquainted with his companions. One of them said that the Lord M.A. was trying to extract from him the rent due from his grandfather ; the other did not know the reason for his misfortune. Ah Qui answered their question without any hesitation : “ Because I wanted to be a rebel.”

In the afternoon they took him out and brought him to the court, where an old man with a completely shaven head was sitting. Ah Qui wondered if he was a priest ; but when he saw a file of soldiers in front of the table, and by its side a dozen men in long robes, of whom some were shaven like the old man, and

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others had their hair loose on their shoulders like the European Devil, all with brutal countenances and ferocious look, he understood that he was dealing with a man who was not common, and, instinctively, his knees bent.

"Stand up ! Don't kneel !" spat out the long robes.

He got up, could not stand upright, fell on his back, and, despite himself, knelt once more.

"Heart of a slave !" said the robes contemptuously, but they left him on his knees.

"Confess everything, if you want to escape torture. I know everything. If you tell the truth, you are pardoned," said the shaven old man slowly and deliberately, gazing fixedly at him.

"Confess !" yelled the robes in unison.

"I wanted to come . . . to come and submit," stammered Ah Qui, after a moment's hesitation.

"Then why didn't you come ?" interrupted the shaven old man graciously.

"False European Devil would not let me !"

"Silence ! No nonsense ! Now, tell me, where are your companions ?"

"What ?"

"Your companions, who robbed the Chaos ?"

"They did not come and call for me, they took away the booty themselves," answered Ah Qui, in a tone of displeasure at the thought of those egoists.

"Then where are they ? Tell the truth and

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you shall be set free," said the old man, still more graciously.

"I don't know . . . they did not come to call me."

Whereupon, at a glance from the old man, they took Ah Qui back to his room with a grille in the door.

The next morning, they brought him before the court again. Things looked just the same ; the old man was the same. Ah Qui knelt down as before.

The old man asked in a conciliatory manner :

"What more have you to say ?"

Ah Qui, realising that he had in fact nothing to say, answered : "Nothing."

Then a man in a long robe brought him a sheet of paper and a brush, and put the brush in his hand. Ah Qui trembled with surprise and fear, for it was the first time in all his life that his fingers had touched a brush. He was not by any means sure how to hold it, when the man pointed to a place on the paper and ordered him to sign his name.

"I . . . I don't know the letters," said Ah Qui trembling and ashamed, seizing his brush.

"Well then, do the easiest thing, draw a circle."

He motioned with his hand, and they put the paper on the ground in front of him. Ah Qui bent over it and, with wavering brush, drew very carefully and with all his might, trying to make a very round circle, for fear of being

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criticised. But the brush was an enormous weight and resisted his hand ; he was struggling to join the two ends to form the circle, when it jumped sharply to one side and ended by drawing a bomb.

Ah Qui was ashamed of the oblong shape of his circle ; but the man in the long robe paid no attention but took back the paper and the brush. He was cast for a third time into the room with a grille in the door.

There, he did not suffer much. He thought that it was necessary for every man born beneath the sky and on earth to be sometimes pushed into a room, to be taken out and pushed in again, and sometimes to have to draw a circle on a piece of paper, but he thought that drawing a circle which was not round would be a stain on his career. However, a little later he calmed himself with the thought : “ My grand-children will know how to draw a really round circle.” And he went off to sleep.

That night, it was the Lord M.A.’s turn to suffer from sleeplessness ; the sergeant had been short with him. One wanted to parade his ferocious authority ; the other, to wait until the stolen booty had been all found. The sergeant, not attaching much importance to his colleague, had said to him, rapping the table :

“ Let us kill one guilty person, in order to cure a hundred ! Look now, since I was converted to the revolution, not more than three weeks ago, there have been already more than

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ten robberies. If we let this business drag on, what will become of my honour? No! Don't interfere in things which do not concern you."

The Lord M.A., out of countenance, had none the less shown the firmness of his resolution, by declaring that he would resign rather than kill a man whose guilt was not proved.

"Well, resign then!" the sergeant had replied.

So the Lord M.A. did not manage to rest all night, or to resign next day.

So, the next morning, Ah Qui was dragged before the court for the third time. Things looked just the same; the old man was the same; Ah Qui knelt down as before.

The old man asked him gently:

"What else have you to say?"

Ah Qui, realising that he had in fact nothing to say, answered "Nothing."

Immediately, many people in long robes and in jackets put on him a white waistcoat with black characters written on it. Ah Qui grew sad, for in this guise he seemed to be wearing mourning—mourning, the omen of ill-fortune.

At the same time, they tied his hands behind his back, pushed him outside, and made him sit with some rustics in smocks in an uncovered cart, which moved off at once. Ah Qui saw soldiers, rifles on their shoulders, marching in front of him. Behind him? he could not see. Yet he shivered, asking himself

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if this was not the way in which they were going to cut off his head. He felt his eyes grow dim, there was a buzzing in his ears, his brain reeled. But he did not lose consciousness ; he consoled himself with the thought that it was natural that every man born beneath the skies and on earth should one day or other be beheaded.

He knew the road, and was astonished that they did not take him straight to the place of punishment. He did not know that they were parading him round the streets so as to show the guilty man to the public. If he had known it, he would have thought that it was quite natural that every man born beneath the skies and on earth should sometimes be exhibited as a public spectacle.

Then, he realised that he was being taken by a roundabout way, and that certainly they were going to—crack ! He looked in desperation to right and left ; a swarm of lookers-on followed him. He chanced to recognise Mother W in the crowd ; he had not seen her for a long time ; she was working in the town. Ah Qui was ashamed of his cowardice, ashamed of having played his part badly : on an occasion like this one ought to sing a theatrical refrain. He hesitated in the choice of a good one : *The little widow going to the grave* was not lofty enough, the *I repent . . .* had too languishing a tune. *I brandish the whip of steel to smite thee* would be more suitable ; at the same time, he

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tried to lay hold of the whip of steel, but his fingers, tied behind his back, hurt him, and he kept silent.

“Twenty years later there will be another Ah Qui” . . .

In the midst of all the disturbance, he uttered this scrap of proverb which no one had ever heard him say before.

“Bravo !”

The wolfish howl came from the crowd.

On the cart which moved steadily on, in the midst of the shouting, Ah Qui looked towards Mother W. She seemed to be paying no attention to him, but to be admiring the shining rifles on the shoulders of the soldiers.

Ah Qui looked at the yelling crowd.

At that moment, the image of bygone events suddenly flashed like lightning through his brain. Four years before, at the foot of a mountain, he had met a famished wolf which had followed him for a long time like a shadow, its jaws wide open, its eyes shining, fixed upon him, devouring him from a distance. He had escaped from the wolf by the help of his axe. Those fiery eyes, eyes of a demon, had, all his life, been the incarnation of terror to him. But here were the eyes of the spectators, still more terrible, at once dull and gleaming, *quaerentes quem devorent*, devouring not only his words and his body, but even something more than that, pursuing him eternally both near and far away.

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Already these piercing looks, all allied against him, were devouring his soul.

“ Help ! ”

Ah Qui did not utter the word. He only felt his eyes grow dark, his ears buzzing, his body dissolving into infinitely tiny dust.

That same night, the wife of the M.A. could not help weeping over this unjust condemnation. A little later the Lord M.A. resigned his post, and remained ever after useless, relegated to the old society which is mouldering away.

Now this is the opinion of the village : Ah Qui was shot because he was wicked ; he was wicked, because he was shot.

As to the townsfolk, they were not satisfied ; first because shooting was not so amusing to watch as beheading, and secondly because this wretched condemned man, although his procession lasted a long time, had not sung a single theatrical air. They had followed him for nothing.

Lu Siun

The Native Country



AFTER an absence of more than twenty years I returned to my native country.

The winter was far advanced ; as I drew nearer my journey's end, the sky became darker and darker ; the icy wind as it dashed under the bridge of the junk, whistled plaintively. Through the portholes one could catch a glimpse of deserted villages shivering beneath the yellowish sky. An irresistible melancholy took possession of me.

Ah ! This was not the native land which for the last twenty years had never ceased to haunt my dreams !

The native land of my memories was not tinged with such sadness. It was so beautiful ! But when I made an effort to recall its beauties and describe its charms, my imagination faltered and words failed me. And I said to myself : my native land could not be other than it is ; although it has not changed much, it cannot be as sad as I feel it to be. It must be my feelings that have changed. Indeed, I was

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not in the happiest frame of mind, on this return to my native land.

I was coming back to bid it farewell. Our old house where several generations of my people used to live together, had just been sold, and the lease expired at the end of the year. Before the first day of the following year, we had to leave for ever our dear old house and our friendly native land, and emigrate to the town where I earned my living.

Next morning I reached the door of my house. In the tiled gutters, tufts of withered grass quivered before the wind, as if discussing the change of ownership. Profound silence reigned; no doubt some of the old owners had left already. When I came to my own family's abode my mother had been long at the door looking out for me; then my nephew, little eight-year-old Hong, ran out.

My mother, with a melancholy smile, asked me to sit down and rest a little and have a cup of tea; she carefully avoided any mention of the move. Little Hong, who had never seen me before, stared at me with big astonished eyes.

"You will rest for a day or two," said my mother, "then you will go and pay some visits to our near relations, and after that we shall only have to set off."

"Yes, mother."

"And young Jun-tu whenever he came to our house, never failed to ask for news of you. He

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would much like to see you. I told him what day you were coming; he will be here immediately."

Then a strange vision rose before my mind: beneath a deep blue sky where hung the gilded disc of the moon, on a sandy plain, by the edge of the sea, sown as far as the eye could reach with countless emerald-green water-melons, a youth of eleven or twelve, with a big silver necklace round his neck, and a steel fork in his hand, was chasing a beaver which slipped between his legs.

It was Jun-tu of long ago. Long ago, when I met him, I was about ten years old; almost thirty years ago—years so quickly sped! My father was still alive then; my family was flourishing; I was a real *chao-yeh* (young master). That year was the one in which my family's great Sacrifice fell, a solemn sacrifice which was celebrated every thirty years. During the first moon, we used to worship the portraits of our ancestors; there were many worshippers, the offerings were numerous, the ritual vessels were magnificent and had to be guarded against thieves. For the occasion we had engaged only one servant, who cultivated his land in normal times. He was too busy. I suggested to my father that he might get this man's son, Jun-tu, to watch over our things.

My father had agreed; I was very pleased, for I had long been curious to meet this Jun-tu, so called by his father because he was born in

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a *jun* month (the supplementary month of the lunar year) and because he lacked one of the five elements which presides over birth: earth (*tu*). I knew that he was about my own age, and that he was a skilful bird-catcher.

One day my mother told me that Jun-tu had arrived and I ran to see him. He was in the kitchen. His face was round, his complexion reddish; he wore a little felt hat and a shining silver necklace, the ring of longevity by which his father sought to bind him to life. He was timid in company; I alone did not make him shy. When we were alone, he chatted freely. Soon, we became good friends.

I do not now remember what I said to him, only the enthusiasm he showed for the marvels of the town which he was seeing for the first time.

Next day, I wanted to see him catch birds. But, said he:

"No, that is impossible now. We must wait for snow. On our sandy beach, when it has snowed, I sweep a patch of ground clear, like this, put a bamboo basket on it upside down, and hold it up by a movable stick; I scatter rice underneath, and watch for the birds from a distance, holding the end of the string which is fastened to the stick. When the birds come and peck at my rice, I pull the string, and they are captured. There are all kinds of birds: quails, partridges, pheasants, red-breasts. . . ."

So I waited for the snow.

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Jun-tu said also :

“ It is very cold just now ; come to my house in summer. In the daytime we will pick up pretty shells by the seaside ; there are red ones and blue ones, razor shells and Venus shells. At night I will go with my father to guard the water-melons ; you shall come with us.”

“ Do you guard them against thieves ? ”

“ No. If a thirsty traveller picked one of our melons, that would not be a theft in our eyes. We guard them against badgers, porcupines, and beavers. In the moonlight, listen to the *ra ra ra* . . . that is the beaver crunching a melon. Then take your fork and jab quickly like this.”

But I did not know what a beaver was—I do not know even now—only I imagined vaguely some kind of very fierce little dog.

“ Wouldn't he bite us ? ”

“ We've got our forks, haven't we ? As soon as you see him near, hit him at once. He's a very agile beast, he runs towards you and escapes between your legs. His skin is as slippery as oil.”

Till that day I had never suspected that there were so many marvels on earth, so many variegated shells on the sea-shore. And then, think of that dangerous adventure with the water-melons, of the origin of which I had no conception beyond the fruit-merchant's basket.

“ On our sandy beach,” he went on, “ when

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the tide comes in, there are many fish leaping about ; they have two feet like a frog . . .”

Oh ! what an infinite world of marvels was contained in Jun-tu’s mind, a world of which my usual playmates knew nothing. These last knew nothing of the world ; while Jun-tu was walking along by the seaside, they, like me, saw only a square of sky held up by the four walls of a courtyard.

Unluckily, the first moon had passed quickly ! Jun-tu had to go back home, and I wept bitterly. He wept, too, hidden in the kitchen, not wanting to leave me ; but at last he was taken away by his father. Then he got his father to bring me a packet of shells and some pretty feathers of birds. I, too, had made him gifts, once or twice, and never saw him again.

Now that my mother spoke of him, all my childish memories raced before my mind like horses in a magic lantern, and I seemed to see again my native land as it was long ago. I answered :

“ Splendid ! And how is he getting on ? ”

“ He ? . . . He too is not very happy, his affairs are going very badly.”

While she said these words, my mother was looking out of the window :

“ Those people who are coming here to buy our furniture . . . if you don’t take care, they might steal something ; I am going to look after them.”

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She got up and went out. Outside, some women were gossiping. I made little Hong come to me, and asked him if he knew how to write, and if a long journey pleased him.

"Tell me, shall we go riding on a train?" he asked.

"Yes, we shall go by train."

"And a boat?"

"Yes, the boat first."

"Ah! There you are! So that's what you've grown into! A beard as long as that already!" suddenly cried a sharp, strange voice, which startled me.

I looked up and saw the prominent cheek-bones and thin mouth of a woman of fifty, who was standing in front of me, her hands on her hips, wearing no skirt, her two feet wide apart like the two points of a long pair of compasses. I was astounded.

"So you don't recognise me now? But once upon a time I used to carry you in my arms like this, I did."

Luckily my mother came in and rescued me from my embarrassment. She said to her:

"He has been away for many years, and doesn't remember anything."

Then, speaking to me, she said:

"You ought to recognise her: she's the sister-in-law Yang from the house opposite, who used to keep the shop where you got savoury beans."

Oh! I remembered. Indeed, when a child,

I could see every day, sitting on the step of the shop opposite, a certain sister-in-law Yang, nicknamed the Beauty of the savoury beans. But she was a woman immensely over-powdered, with far less prominent cheek-bones, and with lips too thin; and as she was always sitting down, I had never seen her stand with her legs like a compass. They used to say then that thanks to the advertisement her pretty figure gave her, her bean business did remarkably well. None the less, she had made so little impression on me—perhaps because I was so young—that I forgot her entirely. Still the compasses were very much annoyed by it; her look of displeasure in which contempt and surprise were mingled, seemed to say: Can it be possible for Napoleon not to be recognised by the French or Washington by the inhabitants of the United States?

She said, smiling coldly:

“It is true that a noble person forgets many things.”

“What do you say? I . . .” I answered, getting up in consternation.

“Listen, little brother Siun; you are growing in honour and in wealth. Too many things are a nuisance in your move; what could you do with all this damaged furniture? Give it to me. We poor people might need it.”

“No, no. I’m not at all rich. I must sell all this, and more besides . . .”

“Oh! la! la! You are called *tao tai!* and

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still are not rich enough? You have now three concubines, you ride in a chair with eight porters. Not rich enough yet? Ah! In this base world nothing can deceive me."

Knowing that I was far less eloquent than she, I said nothing, and remained standing, motionless.

"Oh! la!" she went on, "it's true that the richer one is the more close-fisted one is; and the more close-fisted one is the richer one becomes."

And the compasses turned her back on me indignantly, picked up my mother's gloves as she passed, crammed them into her trousers' pocket, and went out, muttering.

Then I spent another three or four days in receiving visits from members of my family, and near relations, packing my trunks in the intervals.

One cold afternoon I was having tea, when suddenly I felt that someone was coming into the house.

It was Jun-tu. I recognised him at once. But it was not the Jun-tu I remembered. He was twice as tall as he was then; his face, in the old days round and reddish, had become a greyish-yellow, marked with deep wrinkles; his eyes, long beaten by the sea wind, had swollen like his father's. He wore a patched felt hat, and a very thin cotton tunic; he seemed to be shivering; a long pipe and a paper parcel were in his hands, hands which I recollected as deft

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and plump, now heavy and gnarled like the bark of a pine-tree.

A flood of words—partridges, leaping fish, shells—were stifled before I uttered them. I could only say :

“ Ah ! brother Jun-tu ; here you are ! ”

He stopped, still standing, with a mournful attempt at gaiety ; his lips moved, but no sound came from them. His respectfulness made him more and more shy. At last, timidly, he called me “ Lord.”

I shivered, and already realised that a wide and pitiless wall separated us from each other. I stayed silent, struck dumb.

“ Chui-sen,” he said, turning his head, “ come and do obeisance to the Lord.”

And he drew forward a lad who was hiding behind him. It was a Jun-tu of years ago, but thinner and yellower, and without the silver necklace.

“ He’s my fifth child,” continued Jun-tu ; “ he has not seen the world ; he is timid.”

Attracted by our voices, my mother and little Hong came down from the upper storey.

“ Great Lady,” said Jun-tu, “ I received your letter a long time ago ; I was very pleased to get it. When I learned that the Lord was going to come back . . . ”

“ Oh ! Why so respectful ? ” cried my mother, flattered by his tone. “ Did you not call him brother in old days ? Well, do as you did then, and say : little brother Siun.”

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"Oh! la! Noble lady, really . . . how could I? In those days we were children; I did not know what was fitting."

So saying, he tried once more to show us his timid son, and to make him greet us, but the child clung obstinately to his back, and stayed there, looking like a great tail stuck on him.

"Is Chui-sen the fifth?" asked my mother. "This is the first time he has been to see us; he is shy; it's quite natural. Little Hong, go and walk about with him for a little."

Little Hong went to take the peasant child, who followed him without any hesitation.

My mother offered Jun-tu a seat. He hesitated a long time but at last obeyed and sat down, put his long pipe down on the edge of the table, and gave us his paper parcel.

"In winter we have not much," he said; "we raised these few beans ourselves, and offer them to the Lord . . ."

I asked him how things were with him now. He only shook his head:

"It is very difficult," he said. "The eldest boy can already help us a little, it is true; but we have not enough to eat . . . there are always battles and robberies . . . we have to pay everywhere. . . . The harvest is not good. If you go to sell your crops in the market, you are made to pay the tax several times over, and there's nothing left. If you do not sell them, everything will be spoilt—so there you are . . ."

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He shook his head all the time ; and the deep wrinkles never moved, burned into his granite face. Doubtless he suffered sad and painful emotions which he could not express. He fell silent, took up his long pipe and smoked.

To my mother's questions he replied that a great deal of work was waiting at his home, that he would go back there next day, and that he had had no dinner. So my mother invited him into the kitchen to prepare his rice himself.

He went out. My mother and I pitied his lot : a swarm of children, famine, bribery, forced labour, soldiers, robbers, magistrates, notables—all oppressed him. She told me to leave him all the things we did not need.

In the evening, he chose a few pieces of furniture and household utensils : two long tables, four chairs, a weighing machine, a pair of censers and of candlesticks. He asked me to keep for him the ashes from the grates (ashes of rice straw which are used as manure) saying that he would call for them with his boat the day we left.

I was too busy all day to have any time to talk to him. Next morning he left with Chui-sen, his son.

There was a procession of visits to the house ; some came to bid us farewell, others to take away the clothes we left behind, others to do both.

So it was that the Beauty of the savoury beans, who had never ceased prowling round

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the house since we began the move—so my mother told me afterwards—discovered in the pile of ashes ten or more bowls and dishes.

“Yes, Jun-tu must have hidden them there,” she declared, biting her little finger, “he meant to pick them up in his basket when he came away to take the ashes. I’m sure of it. . . .”

So important a discovery deserved its reward. And without waiting to be asked, the sister-in-law Yang seized a hen-coop and went off in triumph. With her high heels and her little pointed shoes, she ran a great risk of falling. But she ran her hardest!

On the evening on which we went on board the boat, only the empty shell of our old house was left; big or little, rough or fine, all our old things had been swept away by the flood of visitors.

Meantime our boat moved on in the dusk. The mountains on either bank, blue in the mist, retreated steadily towards our native country.

Little Hong, who was looking out of the porthole with me, watching the fleeting landscape, which grew ever darker and darker, asked me suddenly:

“Uncle, when shall we be able to come back?”

“Come back? Why are you thinking of coming back before you have gone away?”

“But Chui-sen asked me to go and play with him.” And gazing at everything with big black eyes, he stood deep in thought. His emotion moved us. For my part, I had little regret for

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this sad native country which was slipping away behind us, like a nightmare. My mother pitied Jun-tu's misfortunes and the wretched lot of the peasants ; she lamented the cowardice, selfishness and greed of our near relatives and neighbours, who all more or less resembled the sister-in-law Yang. . . . Still, she gazed long, with wet eyes, at the mountains of our poor village, their outline reflected more and more dimly in the distant mist which was swallowed up in the darkness of night. Then, tired out, she and the child slept.

In my bunk I could hear the lapping of the water beneath the boat. My thoughts, at first hesitating, settled now on the past and now on the future. The picture of Jun-tu rose before them a moment, and then disappeared. Why did so deep a gulf separate us ? Yet the latest descendants of our generations were united : was not little Hong just now thinking of Chui-sen ? I hoped that nothing would separate them. . . . But I did not want them to win an eternal union at the cost of living a life as wretched and wandering as mine, or as wretched and benumbed as Jun-tu's, or as wretched and cowardly as my neighbours'. I wished them a new life such as we had never seen !

A gust of cold wind whistled beneath the bridge. My hopes tottered. When Jun-tu came to take away our censers and candlesticks, I had smiled, saying to myself that he never forgot


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his idol. But now what was my hope but an idol created by my own hands? With this difference only, that his was nearer and more real, mine farther off and more chimerical.

In the chiaroscuro of my thoughts there appeared again the sandy beach, covered with foliage, with sapphires, beneath the deep blue sky where hung the golden disc of the moon. And I thought: hope is neither reality nor chimera. It is like the roads on earth; on the earth there were once no roads; they are made by the feet of a multitude of travellers.

Adapted from Miss Ping Sing

Boredom

 INTO her untidy room slips the sound of chiming bells, and the pale light of day. Plunged still in drowsy torpor, she already feels boredom draw near her. She half rises, and, with closed eyes, seeks the ghosts of sadness which flee before her and vanish in thin air. The corridor is full of the sound of her companions' feet. Her thoughts far away, she pulls on her clothes, gets up, arranges the books scattered on her desk, still pensive.

She has hardly completed her toilet when the breakfast bell rings. She is not hungry. Slipping her satchel under her arm, she goes to the class-room, takes a place near the stove, and mechanically watches her companions pouring into the refectory. "Must one eat to live," she says to herself, "or is it the opposite?" Her thoughts stray idly through time, as her pencil wanders over a sheet of paper.

Some time later, some school-fellows come into the room. They bid her good morning, and she greets them vaguely, without a word.

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Greetings, smiles, laughter, disjointed talk. Silence. The professor's bald head towering over the desk. In the courtyard the snow shines pale on the withered branches. Her attention and sympathy are caught by a passage in the lecture . . . "materialism . . . , the soul is a phase of matter . . . , everything in the world is but the encounter of blind forces and matter" She tries to concentrate her thoughts on it ; but they wander like those blind forces. What is the use of thinking ? Out of thought spring sadness and boredom. . . . It is waste of time.

An hour has passed quickly. Indifferent, she goes out with the others.

She throws on one side the exercise hardly begun. She is stifled in her little room, and yet does not want to go out. The snow, as it melts, drips from the gutter on the roof. The sky is cold, a brilliant uniform white. From time to time, the noise of rackets and the ringing laughter of her companions reach her from below.

She recalls her long childhood, spent in a deserted spot by the side of a boundless, empty sea, haunted morn and eve by the sad monotonous sounds of a horn. She was young, her parents comfortably off : there was no need for worry there. None the less, as today, an inexplicable agony came over her. "I am not making myself sad," says Tang pi pa, "but my heart itself is dying of sadness."

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She had no friend. Books were her only comrades. But her wretched teacher only taught her the classical letters. So she had become accustomed to mourn, with the Ancients, over the destiny of the world.

Afterwards, she spent eight years of life at a village school. At first, she was delighted by it, and then it disgusted her. She had made not a single friend among her many companions. They did not notice how strange she was, because she always wore a mask of cold amiability, which irritated them. She met people outside the school also. These real men, who were so unlike men in the old books, had at first roused her curiosity and admiration. From admiration she passed to imitation, from imitation to doubt, from doubt to fear, and from fear to contempt. Today, the more she knows of society, the more she despises men. Follow them in their slimy course? It is degradation. Fight against them? That is unnatural. What is one to do? . . .

She tries to write all this to her sister but she has hardly begun a few lines when she tears up the paper. Her emotions cannot be expressed. And they are always changing. What use is art? And besides, she would not like to show her own weakness, or to influence anyone. . . .

The dinner hour draws near. She is hungry. Tiny snowflakes float in the cold wind. She is the first in the refectory. Her companions come

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in, with red faces, and rub their hands. Ko-tsi says to her :

“What have you done today?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t forget to write to my brother, and to do the article he asked you for.”

She nods slightly.

After dinner, the ground is white with snow. Si-cheng joins her on the way.

“Be sure and come to the students’ meeting this afternoon: you are a member of the executive.”

She stops.

“That’s just what I meant to tell you,” she answers. “It is Saturday, and my young brother wrote and asked me to go home a little earlier. I have asked leave of absence from the assembly. I beg you to take my place.”

“You always make difficulties. There’s always something to prevent you on such occasions. Doing anything is always painful, it is true. One might say, too . . .”

“What?”

“Nothing. Only I do ask you to go, for the sake of the general good.”

After some reflection, she answers, smiling :

“I don’t believe in that any longer. Everyone wants to display her talents and that’s all. It isn’t worth the trouble. If everyone kept quiet, there’d be no more misery in the world. I, I admit, am only a big devil.”

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She reached the door of her room. When she said goodbye to her companion, she added :

“I really am busy today. Excuse me, and take my place, I beg you.”

It is cold in her room. She lights the stove and goes to sleep. When she wakes, darkness has already invaded the whiteness of the snow. Is night beginning or ending ? Has she dreamed or lived ? It is true that she has not yet done anything. She lights a lamp, collects her thoughts for a moment and writes :

“THE DANGEROUS CRISIS OF YOUTH.”

“The young man, as he advances into sanity, becomes entangled day by day in an appalling pessimism.

“He had respected sanity, from a distance, too much ; he had put too much confidence in it ; he had preconceived too lofty an ideal of it. Now, disappointed, lost in the universal selfishness and hypocrisy, he sees his instincts of love, which make the whole charm of life, blunted, he has no longer any object in resistance, he plunges deep into his wretched loneliness, he does not know whether to smile or to weep, and in distress and desperation, he goes down the slope that leads to suicide.

“Is not this yawning gulf of society the great danger of youth ?

“On the other hand, his aspirations go out towards nature. But nature, so infinite, mysterious and silent, fascinates and terrifies him. At

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once near to him and far away, unattainable and cold, it cannot fill the void in his heart. . . .”

She cannot write any more. At bottom, she does not know what to say. She fears above all some indiscreet consolation.

She folds up her writing-block, puts it in her pocket, puts on her coat and goes out hurriedly. The snow cuts her face, dims the light of the street lamps, whitens the deserted road, and cracks beneath the wheels of her chair. Crows frozen with the cold fly back, cawing, to their nests. In the carriage, she reflects disappointedly: “Did it snow like this before animals appeared on earth? What a fine sight this vast stainless expanse of white must have been then! . . . Cold drives man to his fireside; is that man’s sole joy and consolation? What of those who have none? Where is the eternal fireside?”

As she ponders over these thoughts, she forgets the snow and the wind, when suddenly the chair reaches the door of her house. She enters and goes along the passage. A pale light in the dining-room: her father cannot have come in yet. She goes up to her room, puts down her books and her coat, and goes downstairs. She opens the sitting-room door slightly. It is dark. The air is warm and scented. Near the roaring stove, her mother is sitting, pensively. Her little brother is asleep on her mother’s knee; his soft little face and his mother’s hand caressing him are gilded by the

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flame. This luminous little picture of happiness is framed in darkness and deep silence. A silence broken only by the crackling of the fire and the ticking of the clock. She stands there, in utter delight.

But her mother has seen her. She goes up and bends over the little one.

“Back again? Are you cold?”

She says nothing, but shakes her head.

“Your sister has just written,” adds her mother.

“What does she say?”

Her mother, noticing her look, cries :

“What is the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” she answers, again bending her head. And a tear falls upon the little brother’s face.

Adapted from Mao Teng

Illusions



THROUGH the windows of her cabin, Miss Tsing looked out anxiously, over the poplars on the opposite bank, golden in the setting sun, over the tiles of the distant roofs, begrimed with black smoke, towards the city of Shanghai, now shrivelled and ugly. She thought of the distress, the boredom, the painful vicissitudes and the disillusionments which she had met with there, but which none the less possessed an irresistible attraction. Now she felt that she was saved. The boat left next day.

Someone knocked at the door. She opened it. A flood of words preceded the visitor, Miss Hui, her friend since childhood.

"Ah! you are off, my dear? I have just come from my home. Mrs. Ly told me of your departure. I was surprised. Here's Mr. Ly, a friend, who has escorted me here. . . . But, my dear Ly, there's no room for you here, you can go away."

After dismissing her companion, Miss Hui sat down heavily on her friend's bed, side by side with her. She reeked of wine.

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"Have you been drinking again?" asked Miss Tsing, directly.

"Yes, you know, Miss Cheou said that she could carry wine better than I can. You know I like to be on top in everything, and so I am a little oiled."

"It's a queer taste for a woman!"

"Does it startle you? You old aristocrat! Manners change with the times. Nowadays women are becoming more virile. It's the stream of the age carrying us on. Besides, they've accused me again of a pile of follies. I didn't worry. But, you know, my heart is cold."

She touched her heart, between her two breasts which swelled lusciously. The two women looked at each other silently. They understood each other perfectly, in spite of the striking contrast between them.

At school, where she had met her, Hui was nicknamed "the sulky"; she had melancholy eyes, with long eyebrows always frowning. When Tsing saw her again after she had spent three years in France, she was vastly changed, ultra-modernised. Her eyebrows had become ironical; her eyes crafty, sometimes flashing, sometimes hard; her eloquent mouth smiled with a courteous, contemptuous smile; barely hidden beneath a semi-European dress her slender figure displayed its voluptuous contour. She seduced you, excited you, troubled you, often depressed you. She laughed, chattered,

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joked, with all the men she knew. After caressing, and often tormenting them, she slipped away like a thread of gossamer and never stayed. She got rid of her boredom in the crowd which she despised. This behaviour disconcerted the timid, delicate Miss Tsing ; but her imperturbable good reason, her prompt and firm decisions, were an almost indispensable support to her friend. However much she might dissemble with others, her affection for Tsing was sincere and deep, the affection of a lover and a mother.

Miss Tsing was not at all remarkable to look at ; her figure was ordinary, her voice, her intelligence, everything about her, was ordinary, but all these ordinary features made up a marvellously harmonious whole, whence emanated the sweetness and calm of autumn moonlight.

Hui's crystal voice broke the silence :

" Tell me, why do you mean to leave us ? We are so happy in Shanghai ! "

" Yes, but Shanghai, with its noise, its smoke, its clamour, disgusts me. . . . I was very fond of my lonely, quiet, native place ; since the revolution it has been devastated by soldiers and robbers ; and the people down there are so stupid. Curiosity and the desire to learn, drove me to this great city which has hurt me so badly. . . . And most of all, since you left, I have been horribly bored. "

" Where are you going now ? " interrupted Hui.

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"Probably to Hankow."

"Hankow? Why?"

"First, to discipline my will a little by joining in some social work."

"That's a fine idea, little sister."

"I have discovered that society is too rotten. I shall try to bear my part in the work of reconstruction; I am weak, but I will help those who work."

"There you are deceiving yourself, my friend. Men are much of the same clay everywhere. The revolutionaries are not much better than the others. The ideal is a chimera. It will make you suffer cruelly. Life is a puppet-show; it is amusing to look at it. Take care of yourself first of all, and live as you want to, and the rest will come of itself. I am sorry about your pity: it spoils things. Take and do not give. Distrust men . . ."

Miss Tsing did not answer. She bent her head.

"What's the matter?" asked Hui. "You're not ill, are you?"

She picked up a book which had fallen on the floor.

"Ah! It's Pao Su's? Don't trust him. They say, on good authority, that he was a spy in the pay of a general in the North. And he used to talk so glibly about humanity, the new ideas, love, and what not! I distrusted him when he used to pay us attention. That's how men behave when they want to get on! The rest

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aren't much better. Laugh at them, and leave it at that ! ”

Miss Tsing remained silent and turned away her head.

“ So it was he,” insisted Hui, “ who left this book with you ? When ? ”

“ Yes, after you left, he came, looking so unhappy . . . ”

She could not finish the sentence ; her lips quivered.

In a flash Miss Hui guessed the whole tragic story. She remembered how, after the cinema, she had walked in the French garden with their old companion Pao Su. There, sitting too close to each other, by the lake-side, in a moment of exaltation, they kissed. Then, she reflected seriously on the character of her friend, and judged him severely ; a bold young man, whose boldness was the cause of his success ; his manners gentle and over-polite, a good talker, taken up entirely with social, superficial things, an arrivist, incapable of deep emotion, as were so many of the young men she knew. . . .

She soon forgot the adventure, and left a few days later. He must have genuinely suffered. As depth attracts a stone, so the unhappy are irresistibly attracted by the generous, inexhaustible, gentleness and pity of Tsing. Then, simple and compassionate, she must have given herself. “ What a weak, adorable creature she is ! ” thought Hui. “ And

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the priceless jade is soiled, and by what a beast ! ”

“ It is my fault, all my fault, little sister,” said Hui, falling on her knees. “ Forgive me.”

Tsing, silent, her eyes half shut, like a preaching Buddha, for a long time stroked her friend’s hair.

“ My little one,” said Hui, getting up and kissing Tsing, “ you are still a child ; it is dangerous for you to travel alone. I am going with you, I will not leave you. You are too soft-hearted, too pure, to find your way in the tangle of the world. You are made for the kingdom of heaven. Here on earth you must learn to be hard, hard, hard. If a man wants to live, he must know how to defend himself.”

Tsing did not answer.

The last rosy reflection of the setting sun died away in the window. The silence of night descended upon Hwang Pu. Little by little, the world faded away, amid the monotonous lapping of the tide.

For the first few days after her arrival at Hankow, Miss Tsing began to feel that a new life was beginning. She enrolled herself as a propagandist for the revolutionary army. Henceforward, strong and heroic, she would reconstruct her life and society at the same time. The news of victories, the solemnity of the departure of troops, exalted her. The enthusiasm of so many people whom she had

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no need to know, intoxicated her. It was a kind of love.

But our heroine, barely two weeks old, was soon discouraged, not by the difficulty, but by the emptiness, of her task. The propagandists themselves—they were old scholars of the late dynasty whom hunger had driven to this work—knowing nothing of what they were doing, merely repeated a kind of lesson. The masses called them conjurers. Tsing found herself alone everywhere; she seemed to be crying out in the desert. Soon she resigned her post.

Then, urged by an old friend, Miss Wang, she took a position in the League of Women. There, too, she was bored. "Business" was only the superficial adornment of a futile feminine activity. There was no trace of the flaming ideal which she had in her heart.

Then, an old comrade, Ly Ke, obtained a place for her as secretary in the Labour office. There the work pleased her by its reality and competence. On her desk was a pile of papers vibrating with the life of thousands of working men. For the first time she felt the content of living fully.

But the "revolutionary" behaviour of her colleagues shocked her. On the third day after she had begun work, one of them had come to borrow her umbrella, and did not return it, since he had himself lent it to someone else. One girl who worked next to her,

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called out when she saw her coat, "What a pretty coat. Unfortunately it does not fit me!" None the less, she put it on, without any ceremony, and went off, saying: "All the same it isn't too bad!" Four or five days later when she returned it, the back was torn. Often losing their belongings but freely helping themselves to the property of others, they got used to this romantic communism and enjoyed it. But it worried the timid and delicate Miss Tsing.

Most unendurable of all were their "modern" love-affairs. Every unmarried woman who refused to be flirted with, was reckoned an anti-revolutionary, or, at the best, a feudal aristocrat. Learning from her comrades that Miss Tsing was free, they directed all their attacks on her. A certain Chang never stopped bothering her. So everywhere she was pursued by boredom and disgust.

Everywhere she found the contrasts of which human life is composed; here, on the one hand was the ardent atmosphere of revolution, on the other were a universal monotony and weariness. Every form of activity seemed to her mechanical and based on inertia. Everywhere could be found the ruin caused by boredom; in rest, it became apathy and torpor; in movement, the search for excitement. And to these youths of the revolution, love became a sort of alcohol, a necessary distraction. The contrast was found even in little things. One

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sacrificed one's life more readily than one's post. The clamour against feudalism rang out everywhere; but everyone found a place in the new organisation for an endless stream of cousins and near relations.

The revolution no longer seemed to her to be sacred and sublime. All human activity became in her eyes an illusion. The stupidity of men, the smoke, the noise of factories and firearms, the constant movement disturbed her.

As she looked out of the window of her room, across the boundless waters of the Long River, on the embossed roofs and greyish smoke of W Chang, she smiled, thinking of the battle between the millions of inhabitants on either side of the foot of the mite, that clever fable of Ch'wong tsu.

Miss Hui took part in all kinds of business, never treating it seriously, and always managing it well. She rushed from Hankow to Shanghai; to Peking, Tientsin, everywhere, as if the world were too small a place for her adventures. She often wrote to Miss Tsing, urging her to leave the army and business for which she was not fitted.

But Miss Tsing persisted in her desire to discipline herself and make herself useful. At last, after an illness, she became a voluntary nurse in the Sixth Ambulance Corps.

In a constant stream came news of victories—and wounded men. Among them, Miss Tsing was responsible for five officers. The latest

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arrival in particular needed her care and attracted her attention.

Very young—he was twenty-one years old—his face was rather square, his eyebrows wide, his fine almond eyes were black, and his hands soft. He was wounded only in the left armpit, and as he lay wrapped up in the bedclothes, his thin body, motionless like that of a child in swaddling-clothes, his pale face and his languishing eyes evoked sympathy and pity.

When the first days of torpor were past, he sat half up in his bed, and read for a quarter of an hour the paper which Miss Tsing brought him with his milk. Although still in pain, he took a great interest in news of the army.

One day, Tsing shuddered when she opened the paper which published the news of the first defeat to the west of Hu-pe. She dared not let her patient know about it; but, if she refused to give him the paper, she would rouse his suspicions. So the candid Tsing, for the first time in her life, drew up from the bottom of her heart a lie, which she so much hated. On the pretext that the doctor had ordered it to save the patient fatigue, she would read the paper to him. Kiang wi li—that was the officer's name—protested weakly, but was soon conquered by the power of the pretty nurse's gentleness. And the reading of the paper—making no mention of bad news—became henceforward one of Miss Tsing's duties.

As the young man's wounds, and the news

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from the front, grew better and better, and the nurse had fewer patients to look after, the reading changed to conversation, at first discreet, then more and more intimate.

The young officer told the story of his wound with the greatest enthusiasm.

"It was dusk when we met the enemy's outposts. A hail of machine-gun fire greeted us."

"So you were wounded by a machine-gun?" said Tsing, trembling.

"No, by shrapnel. Our general was mortally wounded by a machine-gun; what a loss he was! I was a captain, in position with my comrades on a hill. . . . Reinforcements did not come. The enemy was pressing us hard on two sides. . . . At midnight the situation was serious; rifles, machine-guns, cannon, all were firing at once. That is when I was wounded." He stopped a moment and, smiling, stroked his scar like an artist admiring his work, and then added triumphantly: "At last the enemy were driven back!" Noticing the joy which shone in the young officer's fine almond eyes, she suddenly asked him:

"What did you feel like as you went into action?"

He laughed, and unplaited his pigtail.

"It's a feeling that cannot be expressed," he said. "If you want a comparison, I will take the dice-player as the box is being opened, or the candidate for the Academy in front of the

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gilded list of the successful ; or the newly-wed bride on the first night of her marriage."

Miss Tsing blushed at this last comparison, which reopened in a moment her sad past. She changed her question brusquely.

"And after the wound?"

"Afterwards, one is calm. Duty has been done. One cannot do any more ; what can a wounded man do ? An old man who leaves to his children his unfinished task, hoping a little dubiously that they will continue it : that is the wounded man."

"You will not go to the wars again, I suppose," said Miss Tsing, in a pitying tone.

The captain understood her, was silent a moment and then replied :

"Yes, I shall go back to the war. It attracts me more than anything else. Nowhere is life more intense than at the front : hope, enthusiasm, anger, destruction, sacrifice, are all combined in that tiny interval of space and time. And what æsthetic emotions one gets ! . . . At the front, one is intoxicated : behind the lines, there is only torpor and boredom."

"So you go there to fill yourself with delight?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes. When I was at school, my friends and I used to love literature and arts. I used to adore futurism, the kind which celebrated force and explosions : shells, cannon, revolution, anything violent, strong, ever-changing, enchanted me. Now, there is no place more

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favourable to my kind of futurism than the front line of a battle. As to the revolutionary ideal, it seems to me superior to feudalism and imperialism, and that is all ! ”

Silently, Miss Tsing looked at the young man anxiously. Surprised by his strange line of reasoning, she thought that this child must be very unhappy. The son of people of high rank, petted and spoiled by his parents and sisters, why did he seek out such disturbing and dangerous excitement ? No doubt it was the reaction of an ultra-pessimist. If he thought that there remained anything in the world which could keep his affection, why should he still be insensible to the quiet delights of life ?

Then she thought of her friend Hui, who after an unfortunate love affair, had become an epicurean. *He* would be as unhappy, but more worthy than she was.

“ What are you thinking about ? ”

He interrupted Tsing's reflections, gazing at her with his fine flashing eyes which seemed to say : “ I understand your heart ! ”

“ I think that your words are very significant,” she answered, a little confused. “ Whatever fine name one may invent for a thing, it is at bottom the same thing ! ”

After improvising this preposterous answer, she got up and said :

“ Captain Kiang, you are tired, you must rest a little.”

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His eyes followed her. As she went out, she stopped, and turning her head, asked timidly :

“Is it really true, Captain Kiang, that there is nothing in the world which can move you as much as a battle ? ”

At these trembling words he felt the deepest chords of his heart vibrate.

“Not until today ! ”

Miss Tsing blushed and bent her head. . . .

Captain Kiang wi li and Miss Yang-Tsing were married quietly and for some weeks were wildly happy together. Ancient monuments, parks, cataracts, purple rocks and blue peaks, the whole mountain of Ku ling formed the setting of their bliss. They invented games and strange jests of love, endlessly. Every part of Tsing's body took the name of a monument. Her eyebrows became the “eastern peaks,” her breasts in which Kiang would often bury his face, were the “rocks of sacrifice” . . . They forgot time and space and perceived nothing but tenderness and delight in their own bodies.

In a letter to her friend Hui, the happy Tsing wrote :

“For a whole year I had gone through such vicissitudes that my frail spirit was quite broken. This is the first time I have tasted real joy, which until now I vainly pursued in my dreams. An immense void is filled up. Time suspends its course and we bathe deliciously in it.

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“We are alone here. Not a soul we know. We do not bother about what is happening at the foot of the mountain. We are in a world apart, the sweet and limpid world of love. . . . I hope that it will transform my melancholy disposition for ever. . . .

“The army brutalises and mechanises man. I suggested to my husband that he should leave it and continue his studies. He consented, like the very intelligent man he is. The future smiles on us. Our happiness is endless.”

Alas ! Life is woven of cruel alternatives ! One morning during the third week after their marriage, while husband and wife were getting ready to go for a walk, a young officer was brought up to Kiang by the hotel porter ; after warmly shaking him by the hand, the newcomer went out hurriedly with him, without even greeting Tsing. Half an hour later, Kiang returned, a drawn look in his face.

“What has happened to you ? ” asked Tsing anxiously.

“Something to do with the army. Nothing important. Let us go for our walk just the same.”

Crossing the Street of the Europeans as usual, they said very little that day. The park was empty and sad beneath the lowering sky ; only the leaves, tossed by the wind, murmured.

That evening, at last, in their rooms, Kiang,

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before going to meet his colleague, tried to break the silence.

"I must confess to you, darling, the officer who came to see me this morning informed me that operations are to be transferred to my native province, and they want to take me with them."

"You consented?"

"I have not made up my mind, but I am still an officer."

"Yes, and war pleases you."

"No, darling, it does not please me any more, now that I have you. Now, I belong to you. I should like to resign, since you do not like war."

Tsing turned her eyes, wet with tears of gratitude, towards Kiang's, which alas! were not looking at her. In a moment, the whole dream-structure was shattered. She shuddered with disappointment and anger. After a long silence she said in a resigned tone:

"My preferences matter little; do what you must."

"I think," he said, still hesitating, "that I ought first to free my native country, and then I shall have the right to enjoy our happiness."

"Well then, be quick, your friend is waiting."

Women have a habit of getting their own way by proposing the opposite of what they want. But this is not always successful. In life, one must often command.

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As soon as Kiang had gone out, Tsing collapsed upon her bed, desperate, silent, with darkened eyes. The world went round before her and she fainted. There is nothing but illusion in the world. Her hopes which were so sweet, her happiness of yesterday, which had been so short, burst like soap bubbles. How different is the world from the one she dreamed of ! This futurist artist, who perhaps sought, in love, no more than violent excitement, went away as soon as, weakened by repetition, its joys no longer satisfied him . . . that was all ! Futurism, that deadly foreign importation ! Life is so transformed by it that she cannot recognise it any more. The duty of killing, how absurd it is ! Ambition, misery, moral distress, emotional disequilibrium, drive men to it. It is only agitation. Agitation cannot kill agitation. Thou art stupid, O man ! . . . Now how much wiser and more far-sighted did her friend Hui seem !

"Here you are again, the dupe of your compassion," Hui told her. "Compassion blinds you and spoils everything. Do not look for any support in the world : you will find none anywhere, if not in yourself. Men are wolves and brutes !"

She hates them all now. She laments her weakness and ignorance. She made a mistake in her choice ; besides, she never did know how to choose. She let herself be carried off her feet by the blind and brutal force of a man

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who had attracted her compassion and not her esteem. He never understood her, and never would understand her! . . . But was it possible for her to find anyone who would understand her, in the muddy stream by which the younger generation was carried along? . . . A fortnight ago, how sweet was the illusion! She was sitting silently on the edge of the waterfall, caressing the head of her beloved, which rested on her bosom, gazing at the golden shafts of the setting sun which pierced the thick blue foliage. . . . All that will never come back again. . . .

Meantime, the melancholy sound of trumpets blowing the call for the soldiers' supper came to her, and with it came the cold wind, the falling leaves and the grey shadows of night.

Her thoughts began to run less rapidly; tears bathed her eyes softly and, as they fell, refreshed her cheeks. She revelled in her melancholy for a moment. Soon, worn out, she fell asleep.

When her eyes opened again, they were struck by a strange sight. Stretched on the yellow velvet sofa Kiang's thin body (he had come in while she was asleep) suddenly appeared before her, like a living skeleton, horrible yet loved. She seemed to have been gazing from all eternity at the white skeleton, stretched out in various settings, sometimes on a sick-bed, sometimes in the midst of the tumult of battle, sometimes, with fearful

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grimace, seizing upon a woman. What was she to do in face of this apparition? Should she wake it? Strike it? Or caress it? She sat paralysed in wild contemplation. She waited for him anxiously to come out of that state. . . . But he went on sleeping. . . .

Tsing is crossing a quiet plain dotted with golden-roofed pagodas. She climbs a slope . . . cannon roar: it is war. Kiang hurls himself into the forefront, despite her prayers. He dies, falls by the edge of a pond, his white skeleton floats in it. . . .

"The enemy!" cries Miss Hui; she drags her off, they flee together. Pao Su pursues them. He kills one of her two children, she saves the other. Ducks on the pond flee. Her son, on a galley, crosses the stream and disappears. She cries out, weeps, laments and falls. . . .

When she woke out of her nightmare, she was in great pain; her husband had gone, leaving his clothes on the sofa; the snowflakes beat against the windows, the icy fingers of the north wind tapped at the panes, and the melancholy, heartrending call of the trumpet sounded the departure.

Yo Ta Fu

Disillusioned

NEITHER the snow which covered Tokio, nor the icy north wind which came down from the mountains of Fu-se could abate the ardour of the festival of the Comet. All the shops were decked out like brides, to attract purchasers. The year was drawing near its end. It was a time of house-moving with rich and poor. The melancholy moment of the lonely and the pilgrim.

In the Upper Park near the Lake of Pity, among a pile of tumble-down houses, bathed in the cold and limpid atmosphere of winter, stood one wrapped in the silence and immobility of death. The windows and door were closely shut. Through a crack in the door slipped a ray from the setting sun which made a golden streak on the face of a young man who was sleeping. He was thin, haggard, sun-bronzed; his features were clear-cut but fatigue had made them old and ugly.

He half-opened one eye, looked at his watch and went to sleep again. At six o'clock he was

awakened by an alarm. He put on his clothes anyhow, scamped his toilet, and went out hurriedly.

For some months the behaviour of Che-Fu (that was the young man's name) had altered entirely. For the first few days after his arrival in Japan, he had peacefully enjoyed the rosy light and the pure atmosphere of the sea-side and had studied conscientiously. Little by little the temptation of the bold and flirtatious women whom he met on every side—which was not the case in his home country—tore him away from his happy state of calm. In the evenings, when he sat in the library and turned over the pages of books on law, out of the boring text rose up images of half nude women, smiling at him, and this inflamed his desires. A moment later he found himself, he knew not how, in a tavern where he spent money recklessly for the sake of the soft smiles and laughing jests of the pretty waitresses. There, he drank and drank. Then he went and walked, with tottering steps, through the deserted streets, until fatigue and the cold light of dawn urged him to go back to bed. This strange life became a habit. He entirely forgot his studies. To work at law seemed absurd for him who had a right to nothing. The slightest contact with a woman, either in China or abroad, had always cost him dear.

The evening before, he had drunk his last piastre. He had left the tavern at midnight. In

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the silent streets, there was not a soul. The lights of the street lamps cast shafts of shadow here and there. Towards the sea, in the vast expanse of damp mist hung the velvet light of the moon. He felt himself alone in the world, and floating in emptiness.

"Where are you going so quickly?" suddenly said a compatriot of his, Mr. Chang, whose suit-case touched him as he passed. "To a house of ill-fame?"

"Oh! you startled me, friend Chang; no, I am cleaned out, I'm wandering about as usual. And you?"

"I am going to the station; I am going back home for the New Year."

"And to see your fiancée?"

"Maybe."

"Congratulations! A pleasant journey, and good luck to your love."

The lucky compatriot vanished in the darkness. For others, happiness waited in their homes. He too had his, but it was so unsuited to his way of living that the thought of it hurt him. His wife was still alive, but was so far away from him, physically and morally, that she seemed a phantom from the other world. She had given herself to him legally, without knowing him, or attempting to know him. He perhaps did not know her any better; a woman with a yellow complexion, with little pointed feet of which she was timidly proud, silent, hard-working, patient, faithful, chaste

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as a sensitive plant. At night she slept with her face to the wall. On the eve of his departure, she had wept bitterly, without saying a word. They had never written to each other. She was not used to expressing her thoughts—for she thought, or rather, dreamed, often, more in words than in writing. Yet in her way she loved her husband. Poor thing ! He deceived her despite himself : he so much needed distractions and pleasures which she could not give him. He was still quite ignorant of love. He was led irresistibly along the road of perdition. In his nocturnal wanderings he ruined his pocket and his health. The sum which he squandered in a night would have kept his household for quite a long time. Now he was reduced to pawning his wife's jewels. How shameful it was ! But he still hesitated. And, beneath the phosphorescent light of the street lamps, in the semi-darkness of the moon, he seemed to see now the silhouettes of pretty and lively, but too exacting, Japanese girls, now the image of his worthy wife, faithful, economical, crushed by her virtues.

He had not yet emerged from his perplexity when the dawn surprised him in his bed, his eyelids heavy.

That evening he went out, with no object in view, and wandered aimlessly. He felt disgust for the world, and for the swarming tumult of the main streets. He took one of the lanes to the west. The yellow reflection of the sun, now

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below the horizon, clung to the roofs, to the tops of the trees in the Botanical Garden, with touching regret. He hunted through his pockets, and found a few *kios* still there ; he remembered the tavern which he had often haunted when his pockets were full of money.

It was a little green eating-house, kept by a widow of some sixty years, who did the cooking herself. Her daughter, Tsing-Eul, waited on the few rare customers, whose social position did not appear brilliant. Tsing-Eul was twenty, and by no means pretty. But her eyes, as pure as autumn rains, and her nose, as prominent as those of the white races, engraved themselves on the memories of all who saw her. She was good-hearted, friendly, and treated everyone with the same familiarity and the same everlasting smile. As Che-Fu was a regular customer, and perhaps one of the most distinguished of them, the landlady trusted him and was willing to let him have credit. Often, half-drunk, he would talk of his loneliness and his troubles to the girl, who always consoled him with wonderful skill and amiability.

"Tell me all that's wrong," she would say, in a voice soft and gravely gay, "and you will feel better."

She was the only friend he had in the world.

A month before, he had heard that she was going to be married. As he drank, he watched her. He noticed that her way of treating him had greatly changed. One evening, she talked

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and laughed to a young man so pleasantly and for so long, that Che-Fu, irritated like a wounded animal, went out precipitately, without saying good-bye—for ever, he thought. And he drank elsewhere, in the big taverns, harder than ever.

“Wine does not drive away real sadness,” says the proverb. So long as he was not intoxicated, he was compelled to realise how barren was his life. . . . Attracted despite himself to Tsing-Eul’s tavern, he recited, as he went, this Buddhist saying: “Beauty is annihilation, annihilation is beauty,” as though to make excuses for his action, although he had no need to render an account to anyone. Night was falling from the sky, casting its shadow over trees and houses. He walked past the tavern several times, hesitating to enter. The landlady saw him. He went in and sat down, unable to say a word. Tsing-Eul hurried to greet him; looking at him closely, with a smiling and caressing gaze, she asked him in an astonished tone of voice:

“It is a long time since you stopped coming to drink with us here. Why?”

He wanted to retort: “You must ask yourself that, you rogue!” But disarmed by the softness of her voice, he replied briefly:

“I was too busy.”

Said the hostess, in a tone of kind remonstrance:

“What? Too busy? But Tsing-Eul’s husband

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has told me that you often went to drink at his place."

"Mama!" said the girl, checking her mother's words with a look.

Che-Fu insisted:

"Who is Tsing-Eul's husband? I did not know . . ."

"He's the landlord of the tavern which faces the Faculty; didn't you know?"

"Congratulations!" sighed Che-Fu.

Tsing-Eul bent her head; after a moment's modest silence, she asked in a low voice:

"Will you have something to drink?"

Incapable of answering, he merely bowed his head in consent. His eyes met the girl's, in which he thought he could see the light of infinite kindness. She went out hurriedly to buy him vegetables. She came back, brought and poured out some wine, sitting, as was her custom, in front of him, but, this time, in silence. An atmosphere of delightful heaviness fell over them.

"There we are, Tsing-Eul, come and get it," called her mother from the kitchen, tapping her frying-pan on the stove.

But she remained seated, with bent head, as if she was weeping. He ate and drank hastily. He went out, floating like a willow leaf in the wind. The moon was rising. When he reached the door of his lodging, he was struck by the silence and by the dark blue silhouette of the building: it was like entering a tomb in

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autumn. He sat down for a moment in the pale light of the solitary lamp in his rooms, stupefied. He said mechanically :

"It's right, quite right ; she was married in January."

Suddenly, he took a fatal decision. He gathered together all his books, and went to sell them to a second-hand bookseller for a sum, ridiculously small, but yet large enough to fill the immense void of his life : to get drunk once more and give some modest presents to his friend.

When he got back to the tavern, Tsing-Eul was no longer there. The mother, warming herself before the stove, was visibly annoyed by his reappearance, and said in a surly tone :

"So you're back again !"

"Where is Tsing-Eul ?"

"In her bath," she answered carelessly.

He went up to her, and held out to her some ribands, scents and an ornamental comb :

"It's a little gift," he said, as though to himself, "which I offer Tsing-Eul for her past wedding."

The mother accepted the things ceremoniously :

"Thank you, thank you," she repeated, every wrinkle in her face smiling ; "when Tsing-Eul comes in again, I will tell her to thank you herself. Sit down there."

Now the silent rays of the moon were riddled by the bare branches of the Botanical Garden.

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He had begun to drink. Very late, Tsing-Eul came back.

“Getting drunk again?”

She walked up and down the kitchen, whispered a few words to her mother, came back and sat in front of him, with lowered eyes. Then :

“Haven’t you drunk enough?” she said to him with a look of tender reproach. “What is going to become of you if you go on like this?”

Her words gave him a deliciously painful shock. He emptied his glass at a gulp, to take revenge on himself; the house seemed to turn upside down, and things faded away. He rested for a moment on Tsing-Eul’s bed. He left, worn out, after midnight. The streets were silent and deserted. The moon silvered the roofs and the telegraph wires and poles, made the street lamps blue, and cast wild shadows here and there. Twice or thrice the plaintive howl of a dog was heard. Death hovered over the invisible world. He had no desire to go back to his room where cold and boredom awaited him. Far better go and warm himself at the station stove. He got there late. Two rows of lamps were dying away in the moonlight. Some empty trucks were standing idle. In the offices, two or three porters were yawning. He went out again, aimlessly. Beneath the wan sky, the stars twinkled in their death agony. The solitary moon was growing

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pale, vaguely outlining the western mountains. The cold north wind cast its shivers over the earth. Yellow leaves fell here and there, whispering like human beings. He listened. Nothing stirred. The rumble of a cart came to him from a distance, idly, as in a dream. . . . A wide expanse spread out before him.

"Perhaps it is the women's Medical School," he murmured.

Then a memory came into his mind, clear and definite like a mirage.

Fallen leaves were rustling beneath the flood of guests pouring into the parti-coloured entrance of the hall of the Chang-ye park. It was a festival of his fellow-countrymen. He was there as one of the stewards whose duty it was to welcome the guests. In the ever-moving crowd he notices a girl of seventeen or eighteen wearing the uniform of a student of medicine, and of so charming a demeanour that she fascinates him.

"Would you be so kind as to let me take your hat and coat?" he says, in a voice which betrays his agitation.

Without a word, she gives them to him graciously.

At dusk, among the departing crowd, he sees the girl once more, waiting in the cloakroom.

"Have you not yet got your coat?"

"No."

"If you care to give me your number, I will get it for you."

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“ Thank you.”

Her red lips and jade teeth shine in the shade with a delicious brilliance. As he helps her to put on her coat, she thanks him with a look of infinite tenderness. He shivers. He feels the delicate sweetly-scented form brush past him as it goes.

“ Wait for me a moment ! ”

He hurries. His long thin body totters and falls to the ground, in the cold mist of dawn in which the moon is vanishing. The yellow leaves which still littered the empty square of the School of Medicine dance around the fallen body, now quite still.

When the indifferent sun, rising as usual, gilded the façade of the Institute of Bacteriology a man in a white smock was putting up a public notice.

DEATH OF AN UNKNOWN MAN

Age 25 or 26, height 5 feet 5 inches, thin, yellow ; prominent cheek-bones ; black ruffled hair, several inches long ; an old coat of black cloth ; in the pocket a copy of Ernest Dowson's *Poems and Prose*, a 5 *kio* note, a white muslin handkerchief, with initials T.T.

Died of exhaustion at about 5 a.m. on the open square of the School of Medicine.

If within twenty-four hours no one comes to identify him, we shall cremate the body. . . .

No one stopped to look at the poster.



